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Understanding the Intergenerational Effects of Mass Incarceration: A Mixed Methods Study Utilizing Multigenerational Data and In Depth Qualitative Interviews

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Understanding the Intergenerational Effects of Mass Incarceration:  
A Mixed Methods Study Utilizing Multigenerational Data and In Depth Qualitative  
Interviews

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor  
of Philosophy

in

Sociology

by

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2018

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University of California, Merced

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Introduction:

The pursuit of upward mobility is a staple of American society. Many come to this country in search of the American dream, and many whom the American dream has betrayed still believe in its potential. Rags to riches stories of the utilization of entrepreneurship and education to create intergenerational cycles of social mobility are held as trademarks of the potential of individualism. What excuses can the unsuccessful individual have in such a free society? The term freedom in itself is relative. Freedom of mobility may be more abstract than once perceived in a post-civil rights American society. Institutional practices that operate beyond the individual bring us to question the ways in which widespread reductions in freedom for certain groups can limit the intergenerational freedom of mobility and choice for their children. When institutions act in ways that promote inequality or reduce societal advancement of future generations, then it can be argued that these institutions have a demobilizing effect. The institutional practice that comes into question in this dissertation is that of the contemporary phenomena of mass incarceration, and more specifically the intergenerational effects of parental incarceration.

What is the relationship between parental incarceration and intergenerational social mobility? Again, the notion in a contemporary post-civil rights society is that all racial groups now possess equal potential to achieve societal advancement and upward mobility; and in many cases education has indeed brought countless disadvantaged persons out of poverty. However, a key argument that this dissertation will make is that even for those on the path of social mobility, parental incarceration can limit, reverse, or impede that social mobility. The effect of the increased societal removal of parents on intergenerational social mobility is a pressing societal issue. Incarceration has

disproportionately become an experience in the life course of poor minorities, and the majority of these incarcerated individuals are parents (Pettit and Western, 2004; Glaze and Maruchak, 2008; Travis, McBride, & Solomon, 2003).

This removal of a parent can be conceptualized as an extraction of vital social resources that would be beneficial to the child's social mobility. Thinking of mass incarceration as an intergenerational process, this dissertation utilizes quantitative and qualitative data to argue that the widespread incarceration of parents risks the widespread demobilization of their youth. Vanessa, a young first generation Latina college student was 17 and in her first semester in community college when her mother was incarcerated for a drug offense. Her freedom of mobility and her freedom of choice no longer seemed as free when she realized no one was going to come take care of her or her younger teenage brother. She dropped out of college, began working two jobs and supervising her brother. She saved for a small apartment, and provided a home so he could graduate. Again, Vanessa did not reject paths of upward social mobility: she was simply born into a time and region in which criminalization is concentrated and corrections are punitive. Her individual desires were secondary to an institutional practice that had just prescribed her advanced poverty, residential instability, and emotional trauma. Millions of children have lost, and many more millions of children will lose, a parent to the criminal justice system at some point in their life. The conditions in which they find themselves when this parent is removed can significantly impact their trajectories.

Intergenerational analyses provide necessary insight into institutional practices that sustain or generate intergenerational inequality. This mixed-methods dissertation utilizes multigenerational data sets and in-depth interviews to expand on the current

research and further uncover the intergenerational effects of mass incarceration onto the second generation. I first address the literature on the effects of mass incarceration, and then uses empirical data to argue that the long-term effects of mass incarceration can sustain intergenerational inequality and result in the demobilization of future generations.

Chapter 1: *The Individual, the Group, and the Structure: Assessing the Educational Effects of Parental Incarceration Utilizing Multigenerational Data.*

Utilizing the Howard B. Kaplan Multigenerational data set, this chapter investigates the intergenerational effects of parental incarceration on educational outcomes of the second generation. Prior research has found that children of incarcerated parents have lower school performance and eventual educational attainment than their counterparts (Foster and Hagan, 2007; 2009; Cho, 2011). This increases concern of the reasons in which this is occurring. Why do adolescents with incarcerated, or formerly incarcerated, parents fall behind in the education system?

This research study further explores the above questions: There are three major findings to this study. First, results indicate that children of once incarcerated parents do not reject education: they do not think grades are less important than their counterparts and they do not hold lower levels of educational aspirations than their counterparts. Thus, findings do not support individual, or culturally collective, dispositions that reject education as an explanatory mechanism in the reduced educational outcomes of children with incarcerated parents.

Second, peer group development can have significant effects on educational performance and attainment. This study has found that adolescents with a once incarcerated parent develop closer social bonds with peers who use drugs and peers who

get into trouble than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration. However, those experiencing parental incarceration did not significantly differ in friendships with popular students. Those with a formally incarcerated parent have 1.62 (OR = 1.62,  $p < .05$ ) times higher odds of feeling liked by students who do drugs than their counterparts, and have 1.82 (OR = 1.82,  $p < .05$ ) times higher odds than their counterparts of feeling liked by students who get into trouble, net of race, class, and gender.

Third, children of incarcerated parents are more likely than their counterparts to experience structural disadvantage, and this structural disadvantage can have negative impacts on educational performance. They are more likely to live in areas of high unemployment, poverty, and drug use. They are not more likely to skip class than their counterparts, but are more likely to have high levels of absenteeism than their counterparts. As pertains to club and school activity involvement, those with a once incarcerated parent were 47% (OR = .53,  $p < .05$ ) less likely than their counterparts to be in a club or some time of school activity. This chapter argues that structural disadvantage and lack of resources is a key mechanism in the intergenerational effect of parental incarceration on educational mobility.

## Chapter 2: *Stories From the Outside: The Long-Term Effects of Parental Incarceration*

Utilizing 20 in-depth qualitative interviews of adults who experienced the incarceration of a parent during childhood or adolescence, this chapter provides possible mechanisms by which parental incarceration can lead to the demobilization of the second generation. This demobilization is conceptualized through elements of financial strain and emotional strain, residential instability and familial restructuring, and the transference of stigma. The financial strain that follows the extraction of resources of a

parent can have many detrimental effects on the long-term outcomes of the second generation. Many of the second-generation respondents were not able to delay adulthood with education after their parent was incarcerated, and felt a need to work and contribute due to the lack of resources. In some cases they are solely responsible for the well being of younger siblings. Residential instability was also a key factor in demobilization. Many second-generation respondents had to change schools and homes numerous times and also often had unsure living circumstances that made educational attendance and performance difficult.

A quantitative analysis was also conducted in this chapter and found that children of incarcerated parents were more likely than their counterparts to experience residential instability, and were more likely report that their family was poor. The interviews provide possible insights into the effects of this. Finally, the transference of stigma from those criminally labeled to those attached to the labeled person is a key aspect of this chapter. In some cases, those who had never been convicted of a crime were stigmatized because of the crimes of their parents. This transference of stigma is an important topic to discuss in criminology and sociology studies of labeling and deviance, as many residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods may find it increasingly difficult to not only maintain a clean record due to their increased criminalization, but will also find it increasingly difficult to be born into a family unit that does not experience any elements of criminalization over time. These expanding stigmatic labels are argued to be an element of demobilization attached to mass incarceration.

Chapter 3: *Secrecy and “Googling” Parents: The Unique Experience of Parental Incarceration*

The final substantive chapter of this dissertation utilizes in-depth qualitative interviews to uncover the unique aspects of parental incarceration many children experience, mostly due to the stigma revolving around this form of separation. This form of parent to child separation, unlike others, is due to the parent’s involuntary removal and placement into a total institution. There is an element of secrecy that follows this separation that is not apparent in other forms of parent to child separation. Many children grow up with questions about the removal of the parent and are subject to experiences of deception that can produce long-term emotional trauma. This study uncovers some of those experiences of deception and documents mechanisms children utilize, such as online platforms, to combat this secrecy and attain answers for themselves. In a contemporary society, “googling” parents became a way to reconnect or discover why the separation from their parent had occurred.

Conclusion:

Throughout this dissertation evidence, will be analyzed to assess the intergenerational impacts of mass incarceration. A wide body of literature will be reviewed and utilized to direct the research questions presented in this study. This dissertation argues that punitive forms of punishment are more harmful than beneficial, mostly due to the demobilizing effect they have on future generations. Achieving societal goals such as educational mobility decrease the likelihood of incarceration in one’s lifetime. Therefore, institutional practices that educationally demobilize are counterintuitive to public safety and long-term social equality. This dissertation also

further uncovers some of the difficulties children of incarcerated parents face throughout their lives.

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Chapter 1:  
The Individual, the Group, and the Structure: Assessing the Educational Effects of  
Parental Incarceration Utilizing Multigenerational Data

### Abstract

Recent literature has documented the negative intergenerational effects of parental incarceration on educational outcomes. Of increasing concern are the ways in which the stigmatic labeling and social exclusion of once incarcerated parents can create negative outcomes in the educational success of future generations. Not fully answered in the literature is why the experience of parental incarceration generates these negative effects. Using multigenerational data of parents linked to adolescents in the Houston School District (N= 1,297), this study analyzes three possible explanations of the reduced educational performance of those experiencing parental incarceration: individual, group, and/or structural level factors. Using multilevel linear and logistic regression models, this study finds that those experiencing parental incarceration do not adopt individual attitudes of educational rejection and low aspirations, but instead develop closer ties with potentially delinquent friends (i.e., group level factors) and are more likely to experience structural neighborhood disadvantage (i.e., structural level factors) than their counterparts who have not experienced parental incarceration. These findings are discussed in light of a racialized history of mass incarceration.

## **Introduction**

Much research has documented how detrimental incarceration can be on one's life-course. It becomes increasingly difficult to successfully navigate the social world when embodying criminality. This embodiment comes in a record that generates and perpetuates stigma toward the ex-offender. This stigma results in social exclusion such as disenfranchisement, loss of employment opportunities, reduced income over a life time, increased likelihood of recidivism, loss of access to government programs, and more (Petersilia 2003). There are many ways to apply correction to actions deemed deviant. In the post civil rights era the United States penal system has increasingly operated in a way in which punishment and exclusion are its direct function. This is almost antithetical to 'reintegrative shaming' in which offenders are reintegrated into society post punishment (Braithwaite 1989) in hopes that they can again become productive members of society. As this is not the function of the penal system in the United States, very little rehabilitation and reintegration has occurred, and much separation, exclusion, and stigmatization has occurred instead. What has been the effect of the recent phenomena of mass incarceration given its exclusionary tendencies outlined above?

In 2014, black and Latino males made up over 50% of those in state or federal prisons (Carson 2015). This is consistent with a post civil rights era trend in which minority males are targeted and punished more harshly by the penal system. In the early 2000s the likelihood for a black male to enter prison during his lifetime was almost 1 in 3, drastically higher than their white counterparts (Pettit and Western 2004). The experience of incarceration is detrimental to overall wage growth, and this is especially pronounced for black males and can influence aggregate wage inequality (Lyons and

Pettit 2011; Western 2002). Not only does wage growth decline, but blacks with a criminal record also are judged more harshly in the employment realm than are their white counterparts (Pager 2003). This racialized and exclusionary dynamic of the penal system in the United States has led some to refer to it as the “New Jim Crow” (Alexander 2012).

As is not often noted, incarcerated males are just as likely as their counterparts to be parents and the majority of people incarcerated and recently released are parents (Glaze and Maruschak 2008; Mumola 2000; Western 2006). Due to the racial implications of mass incarceration black and Latino children are much more likely to lose a parent to the criminal justice system than their white counterparts (Western and Pettit 2010). Episodes of parental incarceration have become “commonplace”, especially for black children (Western and Wildeman 2009). For example at the end of 2007 there were an estimated 1,559,200 children with a father in prison and 46% of that population was children with black fathers (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). As compared to the minor children resident population, this equates to 0.9% of white children, 6.7% of black children, and 2.4% of Hispanic children (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). When considering prison and jail, 11% of black children, 1.8% of white children, and 3.5% of Hispanic children experience parental incarceration; Black children experience parental incarceration for drug related offenses at a higher rate (3.8% of black children) than white children experience parental incarceration for all causes combined (1.8%) (Pew Charitable Trusts 2010). The likelihood of having a parent incarcerated, and experiencing the collateral consequences attached, is highest among black youth.

Losing a parent is a vital resource that can have many negative consequences. This may result in a significant loss of financial resources accompanied by many emotional difficulties and experiences of separation. Most incarcerated fathers had contact with their children prior to the incarceration, and incarceration has been found to severely damage fathers' ties with their children, (Geller 2013). Both maternal and paternal incarceration increases the experience of residential instability for the youth, and can increase likelihoods of their future arrest (Tasca, Rodriguez, and Zatz 2011). Research has shown the experience of parental incarceration increases the risks of children exhibiting anti-social behavior (Murray, Farrington, and Sekol 2012). Young boys who lose a father to incarceration before the age of five show higher levels of physical aggression (Wildeman 2010). And, for both males and females, paternal incarceration can significantly accentuate drug use in emerging adulthood (Roettger et al. 2010). When incarceration of the biological father is experienced during childhood or into adolescence, children experience higher levels of depression and delinquency, and this disposition to delinquency is even higher among Hispanic respondents (Swisher and Roettger 2012). This research highlights the many intergenerational difficulties children with incarcerated parents face.

Recent scholarship has begun to uncover many of the deleterious consequences for children and young adults coming from homes with incarcerated, or recently released, parents. Early on in life, paternal incarceration increases the likelihood a child will be held back a year, and also reduces their levels of school readiness (Turney and Haskins 2014; Haskins 2014). For instance, a study by Haskins (2014) has shown that the experience of paternal incarceration by age five leads to lower non-cognitive school

readiness, and although this effect does not vary by race it is significantly more pronounced among young boys than girls. The experience of maternal incarceration for adolescents significantly increases the risk of dropping out of school during the time of the mother's incarceration (Cho 2011). In regards to paternal incarceration, loss of the father has significant negative effects on student's grade point average (Foster and Hagan 2009). The experience of parental incarceration results in significantly lower levels of educational attainment than for those not experiencing parental incarceration (Foster and Hagan 2007:2009). This suggests that net of existing poverty; the mass incarceration of parents plays a significant role in sustaining intergenerational inequality through lack of educational mobility (Shaw 2016).

This rich advancement in scholarship provides evidence that parental incarceration does in fact promote intergenerational inequality by limiting the educational success of second-generation children. Gaps in this area of research come in identifying "why" or "how" this is occurring. Intergenerational theories of stigma and strain account for many of the effects outlined above. However, how do these intergenerational transmissions of strain and stigma operate? Do they result in the development of a rejection of education due to felt stigma? If this is so, then children with incarcerated parents would show lower levels of educational aspirations than their counterparts. Does the strain and stigma lead to the development of negative peer groups? As research shows, those who lose a parent to incarceration may be more prone to delinquency in adolescence (Swisher and Roettger 2012), but do they develop more delinquent peer groups? If so, those with once incarcerated parents would show lower levels of positive group attachment than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration. And

finally, does the strain and lack of economic resources children of incarcerated parents experience lead to structural disadvantages that can significantly limit educational success? If so, children with once incarcerated parents will live in areas of higher unemployment, drug use, and economic strain, and thus will have lower levels of school attachment and educational success.

This research study addresses these research questions: 1) Does the experience of parental incarceration result in the development of attitudinal dispositions that reject education? 2) Do those who experience parental incarceration develop more negative (delinquent) peer groups? 3) Does parental incarceration exacerbate structural disadvantages, such as living in areas of high unemployment and less school attendance, that negatively affect educational attainment? Children of once incarcerated parents do not do as well as their counterparts in the education system. It is the argument of this research study that key mechanisms in the demobilizing effect of parental incarceration on educational attainment are strain and structural disadvantage, not cultural or individual dispositions that reject educational advancement. The children of incarcerated parents have no lower levels of educational investment than their counterparts, yet experience structural disadvantage, due to strain, which significantly limits their educational pursuits.

### **Conceptual Model**

This study focuses on three ways educational success, or lack thereof, among children whose parents have experienced incarceration have been explained in the extant literature. The first section focuses on individual level processes as the driving force in low levels of educational attainment or performance. The second section focuses on

group level processes and the ways in which peer development can influence educational success. The final section focuses on the effects of structural disadvantage, such as neighborhood deprivation and poverty, and the effects this can have on education.

### **Individuals**

As pertains to educational success, research has focused much energy toward the power and agency of the individual. The success stories of those coming from poverty to accomplish great feats are food for the individualistic cultures vested in the notion of upward mobility. However, to what extent can social trends be explained by widespread individual dispositions? Do individual dispositions explain social phenomena such as high drop out rates or low performance and attainment for certain subgroups of the population?

When the individual is the unit of analysis, issues of motivation and aspirations usually become variables of interest. An individual's motivation to succeed in school accompanied with high aspirations is argued to have significant explanatory power in their overall educational performance and subsequent levels of educational attainment. Of concern then, are which qualities or experiences provide children and adolescents with high levels of educational aspirations? Research has shown that parent's education can have a significant impact on educational aspirations and college attendance (Sewell and Shah 1968). Further research shows a positive relationship with parent's education and their educational aspirations for their children (Spera et al. 2009). Parental involvement nourishes and positively impacts educational aspirations for late adolescents (Hill et al. 2004). In cases of low and highly educated parents, parental involvement still had a significant impact on aspirations, however, the aspirations of parents with low levels of

education did not significantly impact the overall academic achievement of adolescents, measured in grades and test scores (Hill et al. 2004). As there is an argument that positive experiences in education for parents can nurture the high educational aspirations of their children, there is the opposite argument that the negative experiences of those with low levels of education will promote low levels of educational aspirations among their offspring.

Theorists have argued that the historical social exclusion of certain groups in the education system creates an intergenerational cynicism due to lack of experienced success. The negativity these populations receive in regards to education, educational achievement, and perceived efficacy in the education system makes them show little effort or investment in education (Fordham and Ogbu 1986). For example oppositional culture theory argues that blacks may adopt attitudes that reject education due to their history of exclusion, and their rejection of the importance in education can be seen as a mode of adaptation to the following factors: 1) Whites provide blacks with inferior access to schooling and blacks are treated differently in school, 2) an opportunity structure where even blacks who are educated are not rewarded., 3) blacks develop coping mechanisms that further limit their educational success (Fordham and Ogbu 1986: 179). The argument is that groups occupying subordinate positions perceive behaviors of the dominant group as not for them, thus they are rejected or defined as insignificant (Ogbu 1994). The “ending result” is the adoption of an attitudinal disposition that rejects educational success. Individualistic explanations of low educational attainment ironically end up highlighting the importance of social factors, albeit these arguments are framed in cultural arguments. However, many researchers have critiqued this line of thinking and

found black students hold just as high, if not higher, aspirations than their counterparts (Darnell and Downey 1998).

This rejection of education may result in skipping class and investing little hope in the eventual occurrence of educational success. Skipping class can have serious negative consequences on completion and attainment. In a report of high school dropouts, one study found that 59- 65% of those who dropped out of high school missed or skipped class often the year before dropping out (Bridgeland et al. 2006). Most high school dropouts were not severely academically challenged, having grades of C's or better, and much of dropping out can be attributed to life course events (Bridgeland et al. 2006). There is argued to be somewhat of a reciprocal effect, as those with low aspirations skip more class and thus their lack of educational performance fulfills their low aspirations. Research shows that drug use, abundance of unsupervised time, and having low educational aspirations, are all significant predictors of increased truancy among 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders (Henry 2007).

The development of an attitude of educational rejection due to social exclusion may be a possible explanation of the reduced educational attainment and performance of those with once incarcerated parents. Does the social exclusion attached to parental incarceration generate low levels of educational aspirations and a feeling that education is not all that important among the second generation? Do these individual rejections of education result in more classes being skipped?

### **Groups**

Research in the area of education has long noted the importance of peer group development on educational performance, success, and delinquency or dropping out.

Researchers use the term “peer effect” to “Encompass nearly any externality in which peers’ backgrounds, current behavior, or outcomes affect an outcome.” (Sacerdote 2011; p. 250). Peer development can be positive and reinforce aspirations or performance, or it also can be negative and limit overall academic success.

In regards to at risk behavior, studies have found the effect of negative peer groups to be a significant predictor of many outcomes. Alterations in a student’s grade point average and use of drugs are significantly associated with friends’ school performance and use of drugs (Mounts and Steinberg 1995). Students who report not using drugs have higher overall grades and less school absence, while student drug use is found to negatively impact grades (Paulson et al. 1990). Studies have found one of the strongest correlates of drug use across grade levels is the development of relationships with drug-using friends (Jenkins 1996). Peer pressure and peer conformity were strong predictors of at risk behavior, more so than the need to feel popular (Santor et al. 2000). This suggests that when peers engage in risky behavior there are significant pressures to conform that can have negative consequences. Those who conduct in delinquent behavior are often disproportionately overrepresented among those with low school performance and lack of educational involvement (Hirschi 1969). Adolescents with troublesome or delinquent friends engage in higher rates of delinquency, especially in un-structured situations (Haynie and Osgood 2005).

Inversely, associations with positive peers have beneficial impacts on educational performance. In a study of 10th graders, research found that positive peer groups play a consequential role in students’ educational attainment (Stewart 2008). However, high status in school and positive peer groups may not be synonymous (Wentzel 2005). For

example, there is the issue of popularity. Those in the popular crowd in some cases can be perceived by their peers in an unfavorably light and may be viewed as lacking in positive social traits (Parkhurst and Hopmeyer 1998). Being popular in school or having popular friends may not equate to educational success. Some research argues that popularity may have negative effects on school performance for adolescents. In a longitudinal study of 342 adolescents, researchers found that among highly aggressive adolescents, increases in popularity can have significantly negative effects on grade point average and school attendance (Schwartz et al. 2006).

The types of groups that those with once incarcerated parents join may have explanatory power in their reduced school performance and levels of educational attainment. Due to their circumstances, do children of incarcerated parents develop closer ties with at-risk friends?

### **Structures**

Of equal importance is that which operates above the individual, the structure. Structural analyses of educational achievement and performance often focus on issues of neighborhood resources, poverty, and residential or educational segregation. The effects of these elements of structural disadvantage can have widespread negative effects on student success, whether or not that student has high educational aspirations and a “positive attitude.” Neighborhood deprivation, measured by unemployment, youth unemployment, the presence of low earning groups, and other factors of disadvantage, have significant negative effects on the educational attainment of children coming from these neighborhoods (Garner and Raudenbush 1991). These effects exist net of prior

ability and family background, suggesting how strong structural influences can be on overall educational mobility.

Segregation and access to resources is often a very racialized process. Residential racial segregation exists among all education levels (Massey and Denton 1993). Structural disadvantages such as racial segregation are not merely remnants of the past. Racial disparities in poverty and single parent homes also have significant correlations with the racial gap in experience of homicide, suggesting poverty plays a significant role in neighborhood experiences of crime (Ulmer et al. 2012). Education may often be seen as a path out of violence and poverty, yet failure in education reinforces social disadvantage (Machin 2006). Just as the experience of incarceration is a racialized process, the experience of parental incarceration is also a racialized process (Western and Wildeman 2009). Black children are significantly more likely to experience parental incarceration than are white children (Western and Pettit 2010). Mass incarceration, and widespread incarceration in certain communities, extracts resources from already disadvantaged communities.

The access to resources is an important factor in educational attainment. More affluent families have the ability to cultivate their child's progress using middle class resources to structure their children's lives with educational activities, extra curriculars, and other techniques to secure educational advancement (Lareau 2011). Inversely, those from less affluent families can, in the best instances, provide enough for a child to play one sport etc. (Lareau 2011). The less affluent cannot structure the lifestyles of their children the way middle class parents can, and thus these children experience a lifestyle of natural growth, lacking participation in formalized activities, as compared to concerted

cultivation (Lareau 2011). Failure to successfully participate in multiple school related activities can have significant deleterious effects on educational attainment for adolescents (Finn 1989). This may be particularly damning because, as mentioned above, children who experience parental incarceration are more prone to exhibit anti-social behavior (Murray Farrington, and Sekol 2012). Attachment to the school in different ways has positive outcomes on success. Feelings of “school belonging” are highly associated with school motivational factors, such as the expectancy of educational success (Goodenow and Grady 1993). This “sense of belonging” and connectedness to a school reduces the likelihood of reduced educational attainment, such as dropping out for adolescents (Christle et al. 2007). Negative neighborhood characteristics have many adaptive consequences. When living in neighborhoods plagued with disorder, such as poverty, crime, vandalism, and drug use, residents may develop higher levels of mistrust and subsequent alienation (Ross et al. 2001).

Lack of resources embodies elements of “strain”. Essentially strain can be summarized as blocked pathways, or lack of positive stimuli, impeding access to success in traditional mainstream arenas (Agnew 1992). Structural disadvantages can limit access to traditional routes of upward mobility and the ability to meaningfully pursue long-term educational attainment. The ability to consistently attend school can also be a product of structural disadvantage. One study found that besides low levels of academic achievement, school absenteeism had the strongest correlation with eventual drop-out rates, and further, that schools enacting more punitive policies, such as high rates of suspension, actually act in ways that impede educational progress through increased absenteeism (Christle et al. 2007). The inability to be present at school or ready for

school can be a key prerequisite to reduced performance, lack of development of educational self-esteem, and ultimately reduced long-term educational attainment.

It is for this reasoning that structural disadvantages promoted by parental incarceration may be driving low educational performance and low educational attainment among the second generation. And the disadvantages experienced by this population may decrease overall school attendance.

### **Theoretical Contribution**

This study seeks to uncover “why” children coming from homes with a once incarcerated parent do not fare as well as their counterparts in the education system. I advance the literature by analyzing whether, on the individual level, children of incarcerated parents reject education, on the group level if they develop negative (delinquent) peer group, and on the structural level if they experience structural disadvantage that limits their educational performance and subsequent attainment. This study is the first to use the multigenerational and longitudinal Howard B. Kaplan data set to analyze the educational effects of parental incarceration in three levels: the individual level, the group level, and the structural level. This study provides temporal links between the occurrence of parental incarceration in the first generation (independent variable) and the subsequent outcomes of interest in the second generation: such as attitudes toward education, relationship with peers, and structural strain outcomes.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses:**

This study looks at three possible areas in which the “demobilizing” effects of parental incarceration on intergenerational educational attainment and performance are occurring. This could possibly be due to the adoption of negative attitudes toward school

due to social exclusion, the development of negative peer groups, experiences of severe structural disadvantage, or a combination of all three. Accordingly, the following research questions and hypotheses are put forth.

### ***Individual Hypotheses***

1) What is the relationship between parental incarceration and adolescents' views on the importance of getting good grades in school?

H0: There is no relationship between parental incarceration and views on the importance of getting good grades in school.

H1: Those with once incarcerated parents will hold less positive views on the importance of getting good grades than their counterparts who have not experienced parental incarceration.

2) What is the relationship between parental incarceration and adolescents' levels of educational aspirations?

H0: There is no relationship between parental incarceration and levels of educational aspirations for adolescents.

H1: Those with once incarcerated parents will hold lower levels of educational aspirations than their counterparts who have not experienced parental incarceration.

3) What is the relationship between parental incarceration and skipping class?

H0: There is no relationship between parental incarceration and an adolescent reporting skipping class in the past month.

H1: Those with a once incarcerated parent are more likely to report having skipped a class in the past month.

### ***Group Hypotheses***

4) What is the relationship between parental incarceration and adolescents' development of negative peer groups in school?

H0: Those who experience parental incarceration will develop less or the same level of social bonds with students who use drugs, as compared to their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration

H1: Those who experience parental incarceration will develop closer bonds with students who use drugs than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration.

5) What is the relationship between parental incarceration and adolescents' development of negative peer groups in school?

H0: Those who experience parental incarceration will develop less or the same level of social bonds with students who get into trouble, as compared to their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration

H1: Those who experience parental incarceration will develop closer bonds with students who get into trouble than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration.

6) What is the relationship between parental incarceration and adolescents' development of positive peer groups in school?

H0: Those who experience parental incarceration will have more or the same amount of popular friends as their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration.

H1: Those who experience parental incarceration will have less popular friends than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration.

### ***Structural Hypotheses***

7) What is the relationship between parental incarceration and the experience of structural disadvantage for adolescents in school, such as living in areas with high levels of visible drug and alcohol use?

H0: Those who experience parental incarceration will live in areas that have less or the same amount of visible drug or alcohol use as their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration.

H1: Those who experience parental incarceration will live in areas with higher levels of visible drug and alcohol use than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration.

8) What is the relationship between parental incarceration and the ability to consistently attend school for adolescents?

H0: Those who experience parental incarceration will miss less or the same amount of days of school as their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration.

H1: Those who experience parental incarceration will miss more days of school than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration.

9) What is the relationship between parental incarceration and the ability to participate in extracurricular activities?

H0: Those who experience parental incarceration will be in more or the same number of clubs/teams/extracurricular activities as their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration.

H1: Those who experience parental incarceration will be in fewer clubs/teams/extracurricular activities than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration.

### **Data and Methodology**

This study utilizes the Howard B. Kaplan Multigenerational and Longitudinal Data set. The advantages of this data set are vast. This data set is well situated to make intergenerational inferences as the experiences and outcomes of the first generation are documented prior to accumulation of second-generation data. This multigenerational panel study was designed to investigate the effects of stress on people's lives, analyze coping mechanisms for stressful events, and understand why some people fail in the school system, commit crimes, or do drugs (Mathis 2013). A description of the data set and the data accumulation process follow.

The Howard B. Kaplan Data Set collection began in 1971. The original respondents were randomly sampled 7<sup>th</sup> grade students from half (18/36) of the schools in the Houston Independent School District. Houston is the fourth largest city in the United States. Prior to the final year of data collection (2007), Houston had a Hispanic population similar to Los Angeles, an African American population proportionately the same as New York, and the percentage of Houstonians holding a bachelor's degree was identical to the national average (City of Houston Planning and Development Department 2009). Interviews were face-to-face and a structured questionnaire was used to collect

the data. These 7<sup>th</sup> grade respondents were re-interviewed 6 times, resulting in 7 waves for this first generation, the last wave being conducted between the years of 1994 and 1998. When these respondents reached the age of 35-39 they were asked to give permission for their child or children to also be interviewed. These respondents form the second generation of the study. The second generation was first interviewed between the years 1994 and 2002, then re-interviewed between the years of 1997 and 1999, and finally interviewed between 2003 and 2008. The result is seven waves for the first generation and three waves for the second generation.

***Linking the Data and final sample size used:***

This study links the seventh wave of interviews of the first generation with the second wave of interviews of the second generation. From now on this study will refer to the former as G1T7 (Generation One Time Seven), and the latter as G2T2 (Generation Two Time Two). When these two data sets are concatenated there are 1,334 parents linked to 2,224 children. Respondents in G2T2 were aged 13-24 at the time of interview, but due to the large number of missing responses on education variables for those over the age of 18, this study restricts the sample to adolescents aged 13-18. This is argued to be appropriate as the study seeks to assert differences in educational experiences and relationships with student peers and their experiences of structural disadvantage. The final sample size used in this study is 1,297 second generation respondents linked to 998 first generation parents.

***Multilevel Linear and Logistic Regression:***

Due to the nested structure of these data, some second-generation respondents come from the same home.. Students from the same home may respond similarly, violating the

assumption of independent standard errors. Accordingly, multilevel regression is utilized to account for violations in the assumptions of ordinary regression. Two different types of multilevel models are predicted. For the variables treated continuously (educational aspirations and school attendance) multilevel linear regression is used. For the variables treated dichotomously, multilevel logistic regression is utilized. The models in this study utilize mixed effects models, which incorporate both fixed and random effects. The fixed effects variables are the key independent variable parental incarceration, the control variables of race, class, and gender, and the dependent variables used in each study. The random effects variable is the household level variable controlling for respondents coming from the same home. There is no clustering at the classroom, school, or county level, and instead the only control is that of the household level. The findings of the linear and logistic models are presented in regression coefficients, however, a table with odds ratio coefficients for the key independent variable is also presented.

### **Measures and Descriptive Statistics**

#### ***Independent Variable and Covariates:***

**Parental Incarceration:** In Generation 1 Time 7, respondents were asked, “At what age were you first incarcerated?” Those who were incarcerated at some time were coded with a 1, while those who had never been incarcerated were coded with a 0. Of the sample, 1,154 of the adolescents had a parent who was never incarcerated, and 143 of the adolescents had a parent who was incarcerated. This equates to 11% of the sample experiencing parental incarceration, on par with similar studies (Foster and Hagan 2007).

**Race:** In Generation 2 Time 2, respondents were asked, “Which of the following racial or ethnic groups do you belong to?” Fifty-one percent of the sample (660 respondents) identified as white, 32% of the sample (or 420 respondents) identified as Black, and 17% of the sample (or 217 respondents) identified as having Latino descent<sup>1</sup>. Five respondents identified in other categories, these respondents were dropped due to their low numbers and lack of statistical power of inference. In this sample, Blacks made up 46% of those experiencing parental incarceration (66 out of 143), even though they only made up 32% of the sample. On the other hand, whites made up 51% of the sample, but only accounted for 43% of the population experiencing parental incarceration. The relationship between these two variables is statistically significant (Pearson chi (2) = 14.9457 p < .01), indicating that race is associated with the likelihood of experiencing parental incarceration. In this sample 15% of Blacks had a once incarcerated parent, compared to 9% of whites, and 7% of Latinos.

**Self-reported Social Class:** Respondents were asked to identify what social class they felt they belong to. The respondents could answer 1-upper class, 2-upper middle class, 3-middle class, 4-lower-middle class, 5-working class, and 6-lower class. Due to the number of categories, this variable is treated as continuous in the following regression analysis. Higher responses are associated with lower social classes. The mode, or most

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<sup>1</sup> 202 of the respondents identified as “Mexican American,” one identified as “Mexican National,” three identified as “Cuban,” two identified as “Puerto Rican,” and nine identified as Other Spanish-Speaking. One respondent refused to answer and five respondents chose one of the other categories; due to these small numbers and lack of statistical inference, these six observations are dropped from the sample.

common response for the G2T2 sample, was middle class, with 55.71% of respondents identifying with this category.

**Gender:** G2T2 respondents were asked to identify their sex. Female is coded as 0 and male is coded as 1. Of the sample 49.6% of the sample was female and 50.4% of the sample was male.

### *Dependent Variables*

**Good Grades:** G2T2 respondents were asked to respond to the statement, “I believe it is important to get good grades.” Possible responses were true and false. False is coded as 0 and true is coded as 1. Virtually all respondents, 96.80% of the adolescents surveyed, believed it was important to get good grades, while 3.20% reported that it was not important to get good grades. As relates to gender, 68% of those who answered false to this statement were male, and bivariate analysis between these two variables shows they are significantly associated (Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 4.3522$   $p < .05$ ).

**Educational Aspirations:** The second model uses aspirations as the dependent variable. Respondents were asked, “How far do you really expect to go in school?” This variable has seven increasing categories ranging from the low of “some high school” to the high of “professional degree.” Due to the number of categories this variable is treated as continuous. The most common response of the sample was “four year college,” with 56% (or 631/1127) of G2T2 respondents identifying with this category.

**Skipping Class:** G2T2 respondents were asked to respond to the following statement, “Within the last month of attending school did you skip classes without an excuse?” This variable was measured dichotomously with possible responses of yes and no. Yes is coded as 1 and no is coded as 0. Of the sample, 927 or 82.18% of respondents reported not skipping class in the past month and 201 or 17.82% of respondents reporting they had skipped class in the past month.

**Friends do drugs:** G2T2 respondents were asked to respond to the statement, “Most of my (same sex) friends use drugs.” This variable was measured dichotomously with possible responses of true and false. False is coded as 0 and true is coded as 1. Of the sample, 1092 or 84.32% of respondents held this statement to be false, while 203 or 15.68% of respondents held this statement to be true. Of those with a parent once incarcerated, 20.98% report having same sex friends who use drugs, as compared to only 15.02% of those with a parent never incarcerated reporting that they have same sex friends who use drugs.

**Friends get into trouble:** G2T2 respondents were asked to respond to the statement, “Many of the kids who get into trouble a lot seem to like me.” This variable was also measured dichotomously with possible responses of true and false. Of the sample, 448 or 42.22% believed this statement to be false, while 613 or 57.78% of respondents believed this statement to be true. In relation to parental incarceration, 66.67% of those with a once incarcerated parent responded true to this statement, while only 56.77% of their counterparts with a parent never incarcerated responded true to this statement, for a

significant association between parental incarceration and having friends who get into trouble (Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 3.8962$   $p < .05$ ).

**Popular Friends:** G2T2 respondents were asked to respond to the following statement, “Most of my (same sex) friends are popular at school.” This variable was measured dichotomously with possible responses of true and false. False is coded as 0 and true is code as 1. Of the sample, 248 or 23.42% of the respondents believed this statement to be false, while 811 or 76.58% of respondents held this statement to be true. But, only 69.44% of respondents with a once incarcerated parent felt their same sex friends were popular, as compared to 77.39% of their counterparts who did not experience parental incarceration.

**Live in areas of visible drug or alcohol use:** G2T2 respondents were asked to respond to the following statement, “I am going to read a list of problems that sometimes occur in neighborhoods. Please tell me whether you think this applies in your neighborhood: Winos and Junkies.” Possible responses were yes and no, no coded as 0 and yes coded as 1. Of the sample, 295 or 22.74% of respondents answered yes they lived in areas of drug and alcohol use, and 1,002 or 72.26% of respondents answered no they do not live in areas of drug and alcohol use. In relation to parental incarceration, 34.97% of those with a once incarcerated parent lived in areas of drug and alcohol use, as compared to only 21.23% of their counterparts with a parent never incarcerated reporting that they lived in areas of drug and alcohol use. The relationship between these two variables was statistically significant (Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 13.6590$   $p < .001$ ).

**School attendance:** G2T2 respondents were asked to answer the following question, “How many days of school have you missed during the last full school year?” This variable was measured continuously with numerical entries of the amount of days an adolescent has missed school. The most common response was 5 days of school missed, with 132 respondents reporting missing this many days of school. The mean number of days students missed was 7.4 days of school during the school year.

**Clubs:** G2T2 respondents were asked to respond to the following statement, “Do you belong to any school clubs, teams, or activities, either in or outside of school?” This variable was measured dichotomously with possible responses of yes and no. Yes is coded as 1 and no is coded as 0. Of the sample, 757 or 67.17% of respondents reported that they were in some sort of club, while 370 or 32.83% of respondents reported that they were engaged in organized school activities of any kind. In relation to parental incarceration, 58.26% of those with a once incarcerated parent reported being in a club, as compared to 68.18% of their counterparts having parents who were never incarcerated reporting that they were in a club. The association between parental incarceration and being in clubs was statistically significant (Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 4.6090$   $p < .032$ ). A bivariate regression model also found that children who experienced parental incarceration were 35% less likely to be in clubs than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration ( $OR = .65$ ,  $p < .05$ )

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics*

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Coding</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>(m;sd) or %</i>
Parental Incarceration	1= if ever incarcerated	143	11%
White		660	51%
Black		420	32%
Mexican		217	17%
Male	1= Male	654	50.42%
Social Class	Range 1=Upper class to 6=Lower class		3.01;.901
<i>Dependent Variables</i>			
Good Grades	1=True	1027	97%
Aspirations	Increasing levels of education		4.67;1.41
Friends do drugs	1=True	203	15.68%
Friends trouble	1=True	613	57.78%
Popular Friends	1=True	811	76.58%
Neighborhood drug/alcohol	1=Yes	295	22.74%
School attendance	Amount of days missed		7.40;10.15
Skip classes	1=Yes	201	17.82%
Clubs joined	1=Yes	757	67.17%

## **Multivariate Regression Tables**

### *Models and Fit*

Table 2 contains regression coefficients for models 1 and 2, which are both individual level variables. Model one is a logistic regression model as this model was preferred over the multilevel model through goodness of fit tests. This model has a pseudo R2 of .035. Model two is a multilevel linear regression model as the likelihood ratio test conducted held that this model better fit the data than the ordinary regression model. Being male was the only significant variable, and males viewed grades as less important than their female counterparts. Males and those from lower SES backgrounds also had significantly lower levels of educational aspirations.

Table 3 contains regression coefficients for models 3, 4, and 5, which are all group level variables. In model 3, friends do drugs, the likelihood ratio test preferred the ordinary logistic model and so this was used. The pseudo R2 for this model is .056. Models 4 and 5 are both multilevel logistic models, as the likelihood ratio test significantly preferred these models. Parental incarceration was a significant predictor of negative peer groups in models 3 and 4, but had no significant effect in model 5.

Table 4 contains regression coefficients for models 6, 7, 8, and 9, which are all structural level variables. All four of these models are multilevel models. Models 6, 8, and 9 are multilevel logistic models, and model 7 is a multilevel linear regression model. Parental incarceration was a significant predictor in models 6, 7, and 9, but was not significant in model 7. Self-reported social class was a significant predictor in all of the structural models.

See tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 below.

Table 2: Logistic Regression and Multilevel Linear Regression of Parental Incarceration on Views of the Importance of Grades and Educational Aspirations

Variables	Individual Level Analysis	
	Model 1 Good Grades	Model 2 Aspirations
Independent variables		
Parental Incarceration	0.046 (-0.621)	-0.254 (0.144)
Covariates		
Black	0.726 (-0.471)	0.008 (0.097)
Latino	-0.031 (-0.449)	-0.288* (0.122)
Male	-0.747* (-0.373)	-0.2* (0.083)
SES	-0.327 -0.19	-0.233*** (0.05)
Constant	4.64*** (-0.678)	5.54*** (0.162)
Random Intercept		0.517 (0.122)
Pseudo R2	0.0348	
Likelihood Ratio Test		4.58*
N	1,031	1,096

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001; Black and Latino in reference to the White category; 1=Male

Table 3: Logistic and Multilevel Logistic Regression of Parental Incarceration on Group Level Variables

Variables	Group Level Analysis		
	Model 3 Friends Do Drugs	Model 4 Friends Get in Trouble	Model 5 Popular Friends
Independent variables			
Parental Incarceration	.479* (0.232)	.603* (0.275)	-0.393 (0.291)
Covariates			
Black	.404* (0.178)	.456* (0.179)	.952*** (0.234)
Latino	0.326 (0.22)	.505* (0.224)	.708** (0.268)
Male	1.11*** (0.17)	0.3* (0.151)	0.275 (0.176)
SES	.206* (0.083)	0.095 (0.09)	-0.326** (0.105)
Constant	-3.21*** (0.31)	0.329 (0.291)	1.94*** (0.377)
Random Intercept		0.914 (0.283)	0.974 (0.36)
Pseudo R2	0.0559		
Likelihood Ratio Test		4.65*	3.06*
N	1,258	1,031	1,029

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001; Black and Latino in reference to the White category; 1=Male

Table 4: Logistic and Multilevel Logistic Regression of Parental Incarceration on Structural Level Variables

Variables	Structural Level Analysis			
	Model 6 Area Drug/Alcohol Use	Model 7 School Attendance	Model 8 Skip Class	Model 9 Clubs Joined
Independent variables				
Parental Incarceration	.953** (0.321)	2.63* (1.1)	0.278 (0.353)	-0.632* (0.293)
Covariates				
Black	1.62*** (0.28)	-1.86* (0.743)	-0.25 (0.251)	-0.047 (0.201)
Latino	.857** (0.309)	-0.75 (0.951)	0.341 (0.303)	-.521* (0.253)
Male	-0.29 (0.193)	-0.345 (0.554)	0.329 (0.211)	-0.259 (0.169)
SES	.275** (0.106)	1.87*** (0.344)	.276* (0.122)	-0.449*** (0.105)
Constant	-3.38*** (0.485)	2.61* (1.14)	-3.09*** (0.522)	2.58*** (0.383)
Random Intercept	1.655 (0.328)	7.59 (0.398)	1.49 (0.380)	1.29 (0.294)
Pseudo R2				
Likelihood Ratio Test	20.08***	66.11***	9.91***	11.34***
N	1,260	1,096	1,097	1,096

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001; Black and Latino in reference to the White category; 1=Male

Table 5: Odds Ratios for Logistic Regressions of Parental Incarceration on Key Dependent Variables

Variables	Significant	Odds Ratios	Non-Significant
Good Grades	---		1.03
Skip Class	---		1.32
Friends Do Drugs	1.62*		---
Friends Trouble	1.82*		---
Popular Friends	---		0.675
Area Drug/Alcohol	2.59**		---
Clubs Joined	0.53*		---

Notes: \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

## **Multivariate Findings**

### *The Individual*

Using multigenerational data, this study found that those who experience parental incarceration have the same views on the importance of grades as their counterparts, have the same levels of educational aspirations as their counterparts, and do not skip class significantly more than their counterparts. Those from lower social classes, males, and Latinos (as compared to whites) held lower levels of educational aspirations but parental incarceration was not a significant predictor ( $\beta = -.254, p > .05$ ). None of the variables in this study were significant predictors of the importance of grades; because there was no variation to explain: that is, knowledge of the importance of grades was something universally present. In regards to skipping class, those from lower social classes were significantly more likely to have skipped class than their counterparts, but parental incarceration was not a significant predictor of skipping class in the past month ( $\beta = .278, p > .05$ ). Due to the lack of statistical association between parental incarceration and these dependent variables, while controlling for race, class, and gender, it can be argued that the reduced educational attainment of those with a once incarcerated parent is not a result of individual dispositions that reject education. Therefore, this at-risk group is not developing what some would call an “oppositional” stance toward education, and cultural arguments of this group’s rejection of education may not be an explanatory mechanism of the demobilizing effect of parental incarceration.

### *The Group*

Peer group development can have significant effects on educational performance and attainment. This study has found that adolescents with a once incarcerated parent

develop closer social bonds with peers who use drugs and peers who get into trouble than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration. However, those experiencing parental incarceration did not significantly differ with the in ties with popular students.

Consistent with prior research that has shown those who lose a parent to the criminal justice system may be more prone to delinquency (Swisher and Roettger 2012), this study provides evidence that children with once incarcerated parents develop more delinquent peer groups than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration. Those with a formally incarcerated parent have 1.62 (OR = 1.62,  $p < .05$ ) times higher odds of feeling liked by students who do drugs than their counterparts, and have 1.82 (OR = 1.82,  $p < .05$ ) times higher odds than their counterparts of feeling liked by students who get into trouble, net of race, class, and gender.

### *The Structure*

Those with a once incarcerated parent have 2.59 (OR = 2.59,  $p < .01$ ) higher odds of living in a neighborhood with visible drug and alcohol use, than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration.. Research shows residents living in these neighborhoods with drug use are more distrusting and may adopt a sense of powerlessness in their neighborhood (Ross et al. 2001). As pertains to club and school activity involvement, those with a once incarcerated parent were 47% (OR = .53,  $p < .05$ ) less likely than their counterparts to be in a club or some type of school activity. This relationship was also statistically significant. And finally, parental incarceration was a statistically significant predictor of school attendance. Those with a once incarcerated parent on average missed more days of school in the last year than their counterparts ( $\beta = 2.626, p < .05$ ). However, as noted earlier, the findings reveal that they did not

skip more classes than their counterparts, but still, parental incarceration does significantly reduce school attendance for adolescents.

### **Conclusion**

Children with once incarcerated parents do not do as well in school as their counterparts. High levels of parental incarceration can have significantly negative effects on educational attainment, especially for minority children. It can be argued that parental incarceration has a “demobilizing” effect on intergenerational educational attainment and performance, thus playing a role in sustaining intergenerational inequality. This paper has sought to uncover the mechanisms in which this parental incarceration effect occurs. Does parental incarceration generate the adoption of attitudinal dispositions that reject education due to experiences of social exclusion? Does parental incarceration promote the development of negative peer groups? And finally, does parental incarceration generate structural disadvantage that can have negative effects on adolescents’ educational performance?

This study finds support for group and structural explanations and does not find support for individual level explanations. Those with incarcerated parents, or once incarcerated parents, do not reject the education system and the benefits that accompany it. Instead, the lack of success in education among this population appears to be due more to group dynamics and experiences of structural disadvantage. In additional regression models, living in a neighborhood with high unemployment or drug and alcohol use was a significant negative predictor of school performance. Coming from these neighborhoods was deleterious to school performance net of other factors. These structural disadvantages continue as those with a once incarcerated parent attended less school than their

counterparts, and were significantly less likely to be part of a club or school activity. Accompanied with this seeming lack of attachment to school is development of negative (delinquent) peer groups that can potentially promote delinquency.

The inferences made in this study are meaningful in that they shed light on intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. High levels of incarceration in a given community ultimately results in high levels of parental incarceration, and, as argued in this study, parental incarceration promotes structural disadvantage and adverse experiences that have significant negative effects on the educational performance of adolescents. In sum, research should document parental incarceration as a key variable in understanding trends of intergenerational educational mobility. As the penal institution disproportionately affects subgroups of the population, the impact of structural disadvantage on their children should be accounted for. As trends of reduced incarcerated populations continue, the intergenerational damage that has occurred for multiple decades should not be underestimated.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Although this research study offers much insight, there may be limitations to this study that call for a cautious inference. First, this study does not identify when the parent was incarcerated. The experience of parental incarceration may have significantly different effects whether one is not yet born, a child, an adolescent, or even an emerging adult. An ideal study would identify when and for how long the parent was incarcerated. However, this is not a full limitation, as the main concern of this study is how *any* parental incarceration has an effect on the child's educational outcomes. Being once incarcerated can reduce one's overall income, which results in fewer resources for a child

if that individual is a parent. The powerful and lasting effect of even one incarceration is the concern of this piece, and due to the high rates of recidivism in the United States there is a high likelihood one incarceration is a positive predictor of future incarcerations. The power of this sample and study is that having a parent that has been incarcerated at any time can have dire effects on future life-course and resources to the child.

A second limitation of this study is that it does not separate maternal and paternal incarceration and instead holistically concentrates on parental incarceration. There is much to be learned by studying these effects individually, as many have. This study utilizes the umbrella of parental incarceration again due to the punitive and stigmatic nature of correction in the United States. The negative label applied to a parent that reduces their social effectiveness is of concern. For example, although there are different benefits of maternal college attainment and paternal college attainment, there are overall benefits of simply having a parent who has graduated college. This study utilizes this line of thinking and just as positive labels have positive affects, uncovers how negative labels may have negative effects.

A third limitation is that this study uses multilevel models on the household level, due to some children coming from the same home, and it does not account for class, school, and district level differences. Although this again could benefit estimates, many of the questions of concern are not “classroom-centric”. As an adolescent, one usually is not in the same classroom all day and youth typically have a variety of teachers. The questions used in this study are focused on how this sample views school, the friends these students make, and the neighborhood disadvantage they experience. A control for classroom level would do little to answer these questions. Although these students come

from random samples of the Houston School District, the data section explains why Houston has inferential power to explain the experiences of parental incarceration in the United States.

Future research should seek to more closely examine the intergenerational mobility of groups and communities most exposed to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century form of punitive punishment in the United States. Longitudinal data as well as qualitative data of adults now well advanced in their life course are needed to understand how truly intergenerational these processes may be.

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Chapter 2  
Stories From the Outside  
The Long-term Effects of Parental Incarceration

## Abstract

The United States has been the worldwide leader in incarceration for over a decade (Wakefield and Uggen 2010). An exponential increase in incarceration in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has produced many adverse effects and increased social disadvantage for families and communities. This study uses 20 in-depth interviews with adult respondents in Central California who experienced parental incarceration at some point in their life. This study reveals that there are many long-term effects of incarceration on families and that those who experience parental incarceration often experience demobilization through: transference of stigma, emotional and financial strain, and severe residential instability and familial restructuring. These elements combine to produce negative consequences for family members who often have never been convicted of crimes themselves.

Supplementary quantitative analyses of parental incarceration using the Howard B. Kaplan multigenerational data set found that these patterns can be generalized to a larger sample. Parental incarceration was a significant predictor of moving in the past year (residential instability). They were also 66% less likely to live with their biological fathers and 87% less likely to live with their biological mothers (familial restructuring), and were 2.09 times more likely to report that their family was poor (financial strain); all of these findings are in comparison of adolescents who did not have a formerly incarcerated parent. The increased deprivation of resources and transference of stigmatization to the second generation can demobilize whole segments of the population.

## **Introduction**

Researchers have documented the exponential growth in the United States correctional systems in the post civil rights era (Mauer 2006; Travis, Western, and Redburn 2014; Western and Pettit 2010). This huge increase in incarcerated individuals has had many negative consequences for communities – largely due to the increase in maternal and paternal incarceration. Notably, the proportion of the state and federal incarcerated population that were parents nearly tripled from 1986 to 1997 (Johnson and Waldfogel 2002). A report released in 2015 by the Center for American Progress found that between 33 and 36.5 million children have at least one parent who has a criminal record and that this represents nearly half of all US children (Vallas et al. 2015). The growth in the penal system in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, which represented a six-fold increase from the 1970s to early 2000s (Mauer 2006), has led to a high likelihood of individuals coming into contact with the criminal justice system, with currently over 70 million Americans with a mark on their record (Fredericksen and Omli 2016).

In 2015, approximately 1 in 37 US adults were under some sort of correctional supervision, either in jail or prison, or on probation or parole (Kaeble and Glaze 2015). The increased use of incarceration in the post civil rights era has increased the likelihood of long-term separation of parent and child. In the last two decades of the 20<sup>st</sup> century the number of fathers incarcerated in the United States increased five-fold (Western and Wildeman 2009). The loss of a parent can produce many adverse effects on children and adolescents (Shaw 2016; Foster and Hagan 2009; Gabel 1992; Comfort 2007). In poor, predominantly minority, neighborhoods there is a concentration of children who experience the loss of a parent, or parents, due to the experience of parental incarceration.

This raises the question of the ways in which the trajectories of children from these communities are shaped by their parents' incarceration.

This study builds on previous scholarship that shows that parental incarceration can have negative impacts on the second generation (Foster and Hagan 2007; Turney and Haskins 2014; Cho 2009; Western and Wildeman 2009; Haskins 2014; Gabel 1992), but also expands the literature by discussing the transference of stigma to the second generation, and by also documenting the effects strain and residential instability can have on intergenerational mobility. This study design strengthens the argument that mass incarceration promotes intergenerational inequality due to the fact it analyzes the long-term effects of parental incarceration on various aspects of the children's lives. This study utilizes in depth-interviews and quantitative data to argue that mass incarceration plays a role in sustaining intergeneration inequality by amplifying social disadvantage such as financial and emotional strain, residential instability, and stigmatization onto the children of incarcerated parents. This study argues that an intergenerational demobilization occurs through these mechanisms and institutional practices such as concentrated incarceration that severely impact the mobility of youth coming from these regions.

Participants in this study recall significant episodes of financial and emotional strain, the transference of stigmatization, and severe residential instability. All of these mechanisms have negative consequences for mainstream success, such as attending and doing well in school, and holding stable employment. I use multigenerational and interview data to argue that mass incarceration is deleterious to intergenerational mobility insofar as those beyond the offender, for example the children of incarcerated parents, are also punished by the extraction of resources from their homes and communities. In sum,

mass incarceration possesses the quality of demobilization by limiting social mobility over generations.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review focuses on two elements of familial incarceration that can produce the effect of “demobilization.” These elements are strain and stigma. The experience of strain is both emotional and financial in nature. Common elements of strain are lack of resources, lack of support, and overall instability and uncertainty of living circumstances. The experiences of stigma can alter personal identity and, even when they do not, the transference of stigma can have negative consequences on future mobility.

### **Strain and Deprivation of Resources:**

Strain theory is important to understand the effects of incarceration on the offender’s family members. Strain theory encompasses the concept that individuals who cannot achieve societal success, due to blocked mobility pathways or lack of access, may feel a sense of strain (Agnew 1992). Scholars have argued that this sense of strain will make individuals more likely to engage in criminal behavior as a coping mechanism to negative social and emotional environments (Agnew 1992; Brezina 1996; Broidy 2001; Baron 2004). This study utilizes strain theory to argue that the removal of the family member produces strain and lack of resources to achieve positive societal goals for remaining family members. For this reason, it is important to document the financial and emotional strain these individuals experience.

### ***Financial***

When a parent is lost to the criminal justice system the remaining family members, especially the children, may experience advanced episodes of residential

instability, financial hardship, and inadequate resources. Studies have found that although poverty may have many negative effects, incarceration produces an increased form of disadvantage, such as increased child poverty, net of other factors (Defina and Hannon 2010). This argument that parental incarceration increases financial deprivation has been found in longitudinal studies also. Using longitudinal data (N=4,898), researchers found that children of incarcerated parents suffer economic deprivation and are significantly more likely to experience residential instability and suffer from unmet financial needs (Gellar et al. 2009). The detrimental effects of incarceration can significantly alter the family. Incarceration has a destabilizing effect on low-income families and household father absences would be estimated to be 20% lower among ex-inmate fathers if it weren't for their incarceration (Western and McLanahan 2000). This supports the argument that parental incarceration has a significant effect on household father absences. The role incarceration plays in parental absence is important to document as minority males disproportionately experience incarceration. It may be increasingly apparent that parental incarceration may be a significant source of separation and destruction to the family unit. These changing family structures have many consequences for children coming from these homes. For example, father absent households is also a positive predictor of future incarceration for adolescent males (Harper and McLanahan 2004).

High episodes of incarceration increase the likelihood that fathers will live away from their children. When this is combined with their lower earning potential upon release, it is evident that children with once incarcerated fathers will receive less financial support and contribution from their fathers than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration (Geller, Garfinkel, and Western 2011). Widespread episodes of

paternal incarceration put children from these homes at significant risk of experiencing material hardship (Schwartz-Soicher, Geller, and Garfinkel 2011). Again, there is an argument that parental incarceration possesses aspects of cumulative disadvantage in that financially insecure families may have more difficulties handling the additional burdens to resources. Families already at risk prior to incarceration experience increased financial strain after incarceration (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, and Joest 2003).

Parental incarceration reduces housing support for emerging adults and also increases the likelihood of children experiencing residential instability (Siennick 2016; Tasca, Rodriguez, and Zatz 2011). Having a father incarcerated significantly increases the likelihood a child will experience homelessness, and this effect is especially pronounced among black children (Wildeman 2014). Problems arise not only with the absence of the parent, but also in their lack of ability to find housing and employment upon release. Over 60% of once incarcerated individuals reported they were still underemployed or unemployed five years after their release (deVuono-powell et al. 2015).

Residential stability is a key prerequisite for success in other areas, such as in the education system and for finding formal employment. Therefore, the lack of residential stability for children and adolescents can have many dire outcomes deleterious to their overall social mobility. For example, residential instability can result in increased absences from school, and increased absences were the key predictor in dropping out of high school the following year (Bridgeland et al. 2006). On time high school completion is a significant event in one's life-course that can reduce the likelihood of future incarceration (Arum and Beattie 1999), and thus break intergenerational cycles of

incarceration. The problem is that parental incarceration produces many of the outcomes that make high school completion increasingly difficult.

### ***Emotional***

The incarceration of a parent may lead to high levels of emotional stress for children (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, and Joest 2003).. The experience of parental incarceration has unique qualities. In cases of death or divorce the circumstances around the parent's absence may be more known than that of parental incarceration. There is an argument that separation due to parental incarceration is more deceptive than other forms of separation, and this deception to the child can increase emotional difficulties and anti-social behavior among young males (Gabel 1992). A similar study of young boys also compared separation due to parental incarceration to other forms of separation and highlights some of the long-term emotional difficulties of parental incarceration such as higher levels of antisocial behavior and internalizing problems from youth to adulthood (Murray and Farrington 2008). These studies again provide support that there are long-term effects of parental incarceration on many emotional outcomes. These emotional difficulties may not be confined to the initial experience of parental incarceration but will often last long after the fact. It is increasingly important to ask, how do these emotional difficulties affect this population throughout their life course?

The inability to traditionally parent, both during and after incarceration, may produce a sense of role strain for incarcerated parents and parents with a record. Role strain can have many negative consequences on emotional and mental health. This role strain comes from occupying roles that are oppositional to each other, such as being a felon and being a breadwinner, or being a mother plus being an inmate. A survey of 109

incarcerated mothers found that incarcerated mothers do in fact experience emotional difficulties, and this is mostly due to this strain from the incompatible roles of being a “mother” but also “being in prison” (Berry and Eigenberg 2003). The emotional strain from lack of contact between an incarcerated mother and minor child is detrimental to the mother’s physical and mental health, and also has negative effects on the well being of the child (Foster 2012). As there has been a focus on punishment in society, the dependent children of offenders, and their emotionally traumatic experiences, have not sufficiently been accounted for by the criminal justice system (Kampfer 1995).

Parental incarceration produces many of the factors, such as emotional and financial deprivation, that increase the likelihood of experiencing incarceration in one’s lifetime. When a child grows up and also enters the prison system like their parent they are sometimes labeled as second-generation prisoners. A study of these second generation prisoners provided evidence that the emotional effects of parental incarceration are in many cases life-long. Using a sample of 459 prisoners, those prisoners who reported having parent currently in prison or jail also had higher rates of institutional rule breaking and anger, and these negative effects were even greater among those experiencing maternal incarceration (Novero, Booker Loper, and Warren 2011).

### **Stigma and Labels:**

Of central importance to the effects of parental incarceration is *Labeling Theory*. In many cases the label of criminality stabilizes a life of exclusion. The power of labeling is in the utilization of stigmatizing terms such as felon, ex-con, and ex-offender. Individuals in society who are forced to navigate the social world while possessing these

labels have qualitatively different experiences than their counterparts not occupying these labels. In some cases these labels become self-fulfilling prophecies working to promote future criminal activity through the increased exclusion and perceived tainted character of the offender (Becker 1974; 2008). These labels affect an individual in almost all aspects of life. For example, the label of being a formerly incarcerated person is extremely detrimental to securing housing. A report in 2015 found that almost 80% of citizens returning after incarceration reported being denied housing due to their criminal record (deVuono-powell et al. 2015). These labels stigmatize individuals; this stigma lingers over individuals long after their correctional confinement.

In some cases these labels can be life-long punishments with exclusion from conventional society as their core function. Stigma arises when stereotypes or feelings toward a group are solidified with labels. Stigma is a mark against an individual that can limit their access to aspects of conventional society, such as housing, employment, and schooling. Erving Goffman, leading theorist of stigma, has long argued that these stigmatic labels become one's *Master Status*. The labels dominates all other labels the individual may have, such as that of being a father, mother, brother, student, etc. (Goffman 1963). In this sense, society's *reaction* to a person's crime, secondary deviance, can actually be more severe, in regards to social exclusion and future criminality, than the actual crime committed (Lemert 1969;1972).

Contemporary support for the relevance of labeling theory in regards to mass incarceration has been found. The labeling associated with incarceration reduces employment opportunities and can affect aggregate wage inequality (Western and Pettit 2005). The stigmatic labeling of once incarcerated individuals has many negative

consequences on their life-course and overall social mobility. For example, the experience of criminal justice intervention for juveniles has negative consequences on future employment and education, and thus increases the likelihood of adult incarceration (Bernburg and Krohn 2003). Lopes and colleagues' (2012) longitudinal study found that a labeling event of police intervention in adolescence still had a negative effect on unemployment some 15 years later (Lopes et al. 2012). The effects of the label on reduced educational attainment and future criminality are more significant for those individuals who are less delinquent (Sweeten 2006). This argument that labeling theory can sustain and increase criminality may also be prevalent on the intergenerational level. An investigation into youth problem behavior (N=1,009) found that if a parent is arrested and convicted, boys were more likely to engage in criminal behavior such as theft (Murray, Loeber, and Pardini 2012).

### ***The Transference of Stigma:***

To fully understand the collateral consequences of mass incarceration it is important to identify when the stigma applied to an offender is transferred to their family members. The transference of stigma to non-incarcerated individuals is important to understand the effects of incarceration on the social mobility of whole segments of the population.

There are some elements of the transference of stigma in the literature, but the overall effects of the transference of stigma on the social mobility of non-incarcerated individuals has not yet been fully studied. An aspect of the transference of stigma that has been documented is that of social shaming. Social shaming often results in a negative

response to criminally labeled individuals, but also occurs in the shaming and negative perception of their family members. While the parent is incarcerated other family members may experience social shaming from judgmental peers and community members (Braman 2004). This is partly due to the perception of incarceration and corrections as a place of punishment rather than one of rehabilitation or reintegration (Braithwaite 1989). Prisons and jails are seen as simply serving a corrective purpose, and not necessarily providing a social good like that of education or healthcare, and therefore, contact with these institutions leads to an exclusionary and stigmatic response, rather than a reintegrative one (Comfort 2007; Braithwaite 1989).

Prisons and jails are primarily kept out of the public eye. These institutions are often built or placed in the periphery of town. This is one reason why prisons are often seen as places that are outside of society (Schinkel 2002). While incarcerated, individuals are removed from society and placed with others also occupying the label of criminality. This idea of being with similar others outside of society may reduce the stigma these individuals are experiencing during incarceration. Family members, however, are the ones left inside of society while the incarcerated individual is extracted. This makes family members particularly vulnerable to the experience of stigma for crimes they did not commit (Braman 2004), as they may be required to answer for a parent's crime, when he or she is not there to do so themselves.

Another aspect of the transference of stigma is that of the internalization of stigma. Internalizing stigma may be damaging for children and family members. These family members may see themselves as part of a negative group and develop a negative self-concept even with no apparent disposition toward criminal activity. The

internalization of stigma can result in children or adolescents excluding themselves from traditional routes of mainstream success. Self-derogation is a potential response to stigmatization and to recent life-course experiences (Kaplan 1970). This self-derogation occurs when one feels they do not possess the qualities needed for success or to be part of a desired in-group. A felt rejection from valued membership groups may lead to a self-perception of lacking valued attributes, and the experience of stigma and social exclusion can increase episodes of self-derogation (Kaplan, Martin, and Robbins 1982). These negative stigmatic experiences may be more pronounced among children and adolescents in the school system, as they are more likely to be surrounded by peers coming from various backgrounds. How does a recent life course experience like parental incarceration transfer stigma to the remaining family members?

### **Theoretical Contribution**

From the review of the literature there are still many gaps in understanding the effects of parental incarceration on life-course. Very few, if any, research studies have analyzed adult children of incarcerated parents. How do financial strain and residential instability effect long-term mobility? Also, the research is limited in understanding the stigmatic effects of parental incarceration on the mobility of the second generation. Research has shown that parental incarceration is linked to residential instability (Siennick 2016; Tasca, Rodriguez, and Zats 2011), but we know less about how the children experience this, and whether this relationship persists into adulthood and effects them in other realms such as educational mobility.” Studies have also shown the mark of

the criminal record impacts the formerly incarcerated in significant ways (Pager, 2003), but we don't know the ways in which that mark affects the mobility of children.

Due to these current gaps in the literature of studying the long-term effects of parental incarceration, this research study poses the following questions: How do aspects of financial and emotional strain related to parental incarceration affect children and adolescents throughout their life-course? How do some of the elements of parental incarceration already studied, such as residential instability, affect this population in other aspects of life (such as education and employment)? What does parental incarceration do to family structures? And finally, how does the transference of stigma from incarcerated to non-incarcerated individuals affect social life and social mobility?

### ***Demobilization***

The key argument of this study is that the combined negative effects of parental incarceration produce a *demobilizing effect*. I define demobilization as: institutional practices that limit or prevent intergenerational upward mobility of certain groups. The institutional practices that I speak of are those in which individuals are socially stigmatized and excluded from society post punishment. The exclusionary nature of post-incarceration has increased over time (see Petersilia 2003). Moreover, as the majority of incarcerated individuals are parents, how do these exclusionary practices affect the mobility of the second generation?

The significance of the term demobilization is in the perceived “long-term” effects of parental incarceration. Intergenerational mobility can potentially stagnate when valuable resources are taken out of the home and community. These resources may be both emotional and financial. For example, how does the emotional strain of separation

affect adolescents in school, relationships, or future employment? How does financial strain make residential stability and educational success more difficult? What role does parental incarceration play in reducing the opportunity to delay adulthood for emerging adults?

Intergenerational mobility may further stagnate in that some jobs will discriminate against potential employees due to a family member's criminal background. This is an aspect of demobilization and stigma has not been fully studied in the literature. In these cases, the concentrated incarceration of certain communities has a serious detrimental effect in that many people from these communities may be excluded from employment opportunities simply due to association and not due to their own actions. This study also advances the literature by revealing how the transference of the stigma of criminality, placed on non-criminal individuals, can affect them in employment opportunities and in overall societal inclusion. This in-depth analysis captures the effects of familial incarceration into adulthood. This strengthens the argument that the transference of stigma plays a demobilizing effect and that these stigmatic labels limit access to conventional society for family members.

The need to understand the effects of parental incarceration comes at a time when incarceration rates may be subsiding in many states. However, the impact of demobilization is not halted because of the effects of mass incarceration that have already been experienced by society. The upward mobility of entire groups has been affected due to high levels of incarceration and criminal records. Simply incarcerating fewer individuals each year will not restore the demobilization that has occurred. There will still be more than 70 million Americans living with a felony or serious misdemeanor on their

record (Fredericksen and Omli 2016). Since the rise in the incarceration rate after the War on Drugs, to the current climate, much damage to intergenerational mobility has occurred. As blacks and Latinos are most likely to experience incarceration (Bonzcar 2003; Pettit and Western 2004), the demobilizing effect of incarceration on family members must be taken into account when addressing the intergenerational mobility of these groups. Demobilization is an argument attached to the lingering effects of mass incarceration. Many will still live embodying stigma and embodying a life of exclusion even after their punishment. The transference of strain and stigma to innocent bystanders must be is an important concept to analyze.

### **Data and Methodology: Mixed Methods Approach**

#### ***Qualitative Data***

To uncover the intergenerational consequences of familial incarceration this research study utilizes twenty in-depth qualitative interviews. To be an eligible participant in this study participants must have experienced incarceration of a parent (and in one case an older brother who occupied a parental role) at some point in their life and must be eighteen or older at the time of the interview. There are a few justifications for using adults in this study and not children. First, to uncover the long-term effects it is important to analyze how the incarceration of a family member can affect an individual throughout their life-course. This is difficult to do with children who may not have yet experienced the full impact of parental incarceration on their life-course

Interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 2 hours. The interviewer used a semi-structured interview guide and probed according to responses. The names of the interviewees have been replaced with pseudonyms. All participants signed a consent

waiver and were informed that they were at no risk for participating in this study and would experience no harm other than that of emotions recalling difficult memories. Participants in the study were given a \$30 gift-card at Target, and were allowed to stop the interview at any time. The interviews were transcribed. Each transcribed interview was analyzed which resulted in the development of reoccurring themes. These themes were then coded and extracted from each interview. Quotes from these reoccurring themes were compiled and placed into a word document.

Why Central California?

In 2015 California had the second highest state and federal prison population in the United States, just behind Texas, with 136,085 offenders (Carson and Anderson 2016). In this same year, California was also second in total correctional population under supervision, with over a half a million people (550,600) in jail, prison, on probation, or on parole (Kaeble and Glaze 2016). Since the 1980's California has built 23 prisons and 1 University (Gilmore 2007). This high presence of incarceration in the state of California means that many family members are experiencing familial separation through the criminal justice system. Participants in this study come from Central and Southern California. All of their family members were incarcerated here in California.

### ***Quantitative Data***

This study also utilizes multigenerational data to analyze the effects of parental incarceration on long-term outcomes such as familial restructuring, financial strain, and residential instability. The Howard B. Kaplan Data Set, as described in the last chapter, is a Multigenerational data accumulated in Houston, Texas with seven waves of parental surveys and three waves of surveys of their children throughout their life-course. The

issue of whether or not the parent had ever been incarcerated can be identified temporally prior to many of the outcomes studied. Of this sample of 2,210 children linked to adults (13-34), utilized in generation two wave two, two-hundred and seventy-nine (12.62%) of the participants had a parent who was incarcerated at some time. The following analysis uses Multilevel Logistic regression models to uncover the effects of parental incarceration on four outcomes: Moving house or apartment within the past 12 months, reporting that one's family is poor, living with one's biological mother, and living with one's biological father. The findings of the quantitative models comparing the outcomes of children of incarcerated parents to their counterparts are presented below.

### **Findings:**

#### ***Quantitative Findings***

To first quantitatively assess the relationship between parental incarceration and financial strain (or increased poverty), this study utilizes the Howard B. Kaplan Multigenerational Data Set. This analysis is grounded in the research question: Are those with a once incarcerated parent more likely to be financially unstable or live in poverty than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration? The findings of this bivariate and multivariate analysis reveal the following. Of the sample (N = 2,210), 18% of those with a once incarcerated parent, as compared to only 13% of their counterparts, reported, "My family could not give me the same chances to succeed that other kids have." When asked to respond to the statement, "My family is pretty poor," 20% of those with a once incarcerated parent said yes their family was pretty poor, compared to only 11% of their counterparts. The bivariate chi-square analysis provided support that there

was a significant relationship between parental incarceration and family poverty ( $\chi^2 = 17.06, p < .001$ ).

A multilevel logistic regression model conducted reveals that those who had a once incarcerated parent were 2.09 times more likely to report having a poor family than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration ( $OR=2.09, p < .01$ ), net of controls of race, class, and gender. This leads to the question of how this increased experience of poverty affects children with incarcerated parents, both emotionally and financially. How does this increased poverty, or financial strain, affect them in other aspects of life?

To assess the theme of residential instability and familial restructuring, a multigenerational analysis was conducted. This analysis sought to answer two questions: 1) Do those with an incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parent experience higher levels of residential instability than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration? This question was operationalized with the question asked to respondents “Within the last year did your family move to a different house or apartment?” 2) Do those with once a once incarcerated parent experience significantly higher levels of familial restructuring than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration? This research inquiry was operationalized with two questions “Are you currently living with your biological mother?” and, “Are you currently living with your biological father?”

Of the sample ( $N=2,210$ ) 38.6% of those with a once incarcerated parent reported their family had moved within the past year, compared to only 27.5% of their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration. The chi square statistical test of association between these variables found that there is a significant relationship between

parental incarceration and moving ( $\chi^2(1) = 14.27, p < .001$ ). The multilevel logistic model holds significant results as well. Those with a once incarcerated parent are 1.98 times as likely as their counterparts to report moving in the past year (OR=1.98,  $p < .01$ ).

In regards to the structure of the family, two additional multilevel logistic models were conducted. The findings of these models reveal that those who have once incarcerated parent are 66% less likely to live with their biological mother (OR=.34,  $p < .001$ ) and 87% less likely to live with their biological father (OR=.13,  $p < .001$ ) than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration. The qualitative data incorporated in this study provides possible mechanisms of *how* these children come to be more likely separated from a parent. The majority of participants in the qualitative study did not live with their parent after the incarceration, but either lived with the parent or had consistent contact before the incarceration. The significantly lower likelihood of living with one's biological parent due to incarceration can be seen as a significant form of separation and strain. In either case, the changing family dynamics produce adverse effects on children and adolescents. Significant familial restructuring often resulted in children being taken care of by other family members, such as grandparents, and in other cases ended up in foster care or adoption.

Break:  
See Table 6

Table 6: Multilevel Logistic Regression Models of Parental Incarceration on Financial Strain, Residential Instability, and Family Restructuring (Odds Ratios Presented)

Variables	Model 10 Family/Poor	Model 11 Moved/12 Months	Model 12 Live/Mother	Model 13 Live/Father
Independent variables				
Parental Incarceration	2.09** (0.481)	1.98** (0.497)	.336*** (0.073)	.129*** (0.058)
Covariates				
Black	1.47* (0.271)	1.56* (0.291)	0.989 (0.156)	.096*** (0.031)
Latino	1.11 (0.274)	0.95 (0.233)	1.21 (0.249)	0.895 (0.302)
Male	1.26 (0.199)	1.03 (0.145)	1.02 (0.128)	1.78** (0.343)
SES	1.64*** (0.123)	1.22** (0.086)	.619*** (0.041)	0.513*** (0.056)
Constant	0.011*** (0.004)	.094*** (0.027)	14.2*** (3.78)	3.53** (1.32)
Random Intercept	1.17 (0.184)	1.89 (0.183)	1.43 (0.157)	3.15 (0.25)
Pseudo R2				
Likelihood Ratio Test	21.33***	110.58***	63.01***	266.87***
N	2,142	2,133	2,080	2,080

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001; Black and Latino in reference to the White category; 1=Male

### *Qualitative Themes and Findings*

Participants from the qualitative portion of this study experienced many adverse effects related to the incarceration of their parent. Parents were incarcerated for a wide array of reasons mostly non-violent, but some were also incarcerated for offenses that were violent in nature. The most common experiences of participants were emotional and financial strain, residential instability and familial restructuring, the transference of stigma, secrecy, and relief. (Note: Due to the different circumstances around secrecy and relief, the next chapter is solely dedicated to those findings). The findings are discussed

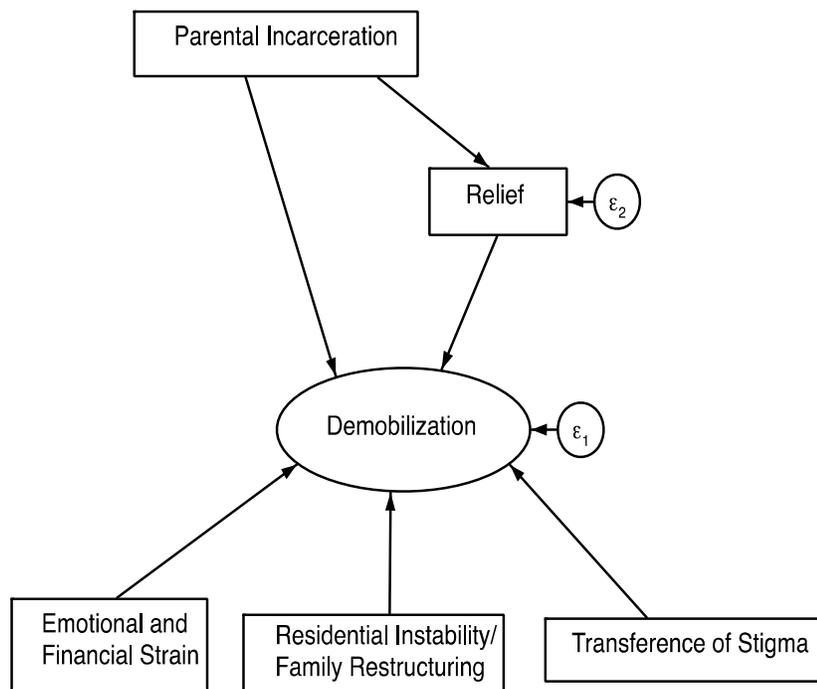


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Combined Effects of Parental Incarceration on Demobilization.

### **Financial and Emotional Strain**

Financial and emotional strain were reoccurring themes in this study. Financial strain represents increased episodes of poverty, lack of resources to pursue traditional societal goals, and overall reduced material resources. This advanced experience of poverty and financial strain was sometimes devastating to life-course mobility and societal success. The effects of financial strain were vast and multidimensional, often further reducing family structure as many were prematurely pushed into the workforce. Reduced living standards and increased school absenteeism were also reoccurring experiences related to advanced poverty. Other financial difficulties came in the redirection of resources, such as bail, lawyers, and supporting the family member while they could not contribute.

Emotional strain represents the negative emotions that arise due to parental incarceration, but also the deprivation of emotional resources, such as a parent, from children and adolescents. This emotional strain often embodied the extraction of traditional emotionally valuable stimuli, such as physical hugs and parental comfort, and replaced with not-traditional emotional interactions with parents, such as reading letters and visitations. Sometimes the children were not presented the letters and family members actively prevented contact, sometimes children chose not to open the letters themselves and instead just collected them or threw them away, and some respondents were involved in the emotional letter writing process at a young age. Common emotional experiences were anger or resentment over the situation, persistent sadness and feelings of helplessness over the separation, and depression.

The experiences of financial and emotional strain were in many cases intersectional and occurred in tandem. Many participants expressed severe deprivation of resources when the parent or family member was absent due to incarceration, and in many cases even when the family member returned. All of the participants reported experiencing some level of emotional strain and 11 out of 20 (55%) of the participants expressed they experienced episodes of financial strain whilst the family member was incarcerated, and in many cases even after the parent was released. Many were forced to work and had no opportunity to delay adulthood through education. Others experienced severe poverty that made it difficult to go to school. Financial strain had one of the more severe and long-term effects on demobilization. The loss of a parent, for those who may not have been very well off to begin with, limited the opportunities for those coming from those homes. The emotional strains respondents experienced often persisted throughout their life.

Take for example, Vanessa, who was in her senior year of high school when her mother was incarcerated. After her mother's incarceration Vanessa had to take care of her juvenile brother. She had filled out all of the paperwork and scholarship applications to attend college upon graduation, and subsequently began attending in the fall. However, the extraction of her mother, and the resources her mother provided for the family, placed Vanessa, her sister, and her 16-year-old brother in harsh circumstances. For the first period of her mother's incarceration they were homeless. They finally saved up to get an apartment. As her brother could not work, and no social agencies ever visited the remaining children to check on their well-being, the burden fell on Vanessa. She had to drop out of college after one semester and instead worked two jobs to pay the bills in the home and provide for the younger brother. It has been 9 years since her mother's

incarceration and Vanessa is still the head of her household and has not been able to attend college.

Vanessa shared, “..but we would literally live by paycheck to paycheck but the good thing was that my sister worked and I worked two jobs so we were able to provide the food and the bill. We never had extra money to do normal stuff like you know people who had their parents to do stuff and we didn’t cause you know we either had to work or don’t have the money.”

Vanessa recalls that her experience was qualitatively different than that of adolescents with their parents present in their life. Vanessa was living with her stepfather and mother, once her mother was incarcerated the stepfather left also and Vanessa and her younger siblings were essentially left parentless. This strain of financial responsibility limited Vanessa’s ability to delay adulthood through education. Even the minor things, “normal stuff like you know people who had their parents to do stuff,” became increasingly difficult for Vanessa. There is a sense that parental incarceration introduces an abnormality of lifestyle, even among populations already somewhat disadvantaged. I asked Vanessa how her family life had changed since the incarceration and she responded.

Vanessa: “If she was here, I probably would have stayed in school and just everything else I went through I wouldn’t have gone through maybe as much as I did. And my brother didn’t graduate from high school. But he got his diploma but didn’t walk. I think it was because of that...he missed so many days from school. ... I think he

would like miss school because it was just me and my sister you know? No one was there to force him to go to school.”

Vanessa responded that she most likely would have stayed in school if not for the incarceration of her mother and her immediate role reversal into that of a parent or provider. In some cases older siblings become parents while the one remaining parent works, and in other cases the parents are absent altogether and the oldest sibling must adopt the parental role. In these cases this reduces their opportunity to delay adulthood, through education etc., and results in their early *parentification* (Hanser 2013). She also recalls that absenteeism was a problem with her younger brother due to the changing family structure.

Many respondents recalled a similar experience of both financial and emotional strain. The loss of one parent due to incarceration can produce financial strain in which the remaining parent tries to compensate with an increased workload. Subsequently, this leads to increased emotional difficulties as the child, who may have gone through a traumatic event, now has less contact with both of their parents. This can incite feelings of anger, resentment, and confusion among children with incarcerated parents. An example of this is Cristina, shortly after her birth her father was incarcerated for drug and gang related charges. The loss of her father resulted in financial strain in that she recalls her mother working so much that for much of her childhood she had little contact with either parent. She also had much emotional strain in the absence of her father and the non-traditional contact of receiving letters from him at a young age.

Cristina: “When I was little I use to always write letters to him. And then as I got older I stopped because I got busier. I kinda had resentment towards him. Just cause he was never in my life. Like why do I have to be forced to talk to you when you were never there for me?”

As Cristina notes, this non-traditional form of emotional interaction with her father increased her feelings of resentment. She feels that he was “never there for her,” and “was never in her life.” This quote suggests that Cristina was knowledgeable that this was not the traditional form of parental interaction and involvement. Even though he was writing her, he still *was never there for her*. The lack of traditional physical contact and valuable emotional stimuli may be a key source of her resentment toward her father. To probe further into this notion of traditional parental contact and non-traditional parental contact, I then asked Cristina if she thinks her childhood was different from that of other children. She responded affirmatively, explaining: “till this day I am kind of envious of kids that had both their parents. Just cause I never got to have that.”

She explained further, “I was always friends with like the white kids. So they always had like the double families and stuff. So they and I would just be like, ‘oh you’re so lucky.’ And they’d be like, ‘no I hate my parents.’ And I’d be like, ‘why? I only have one. You should feel lucky. And I don’t even get to see my mom because she’s always working’. ... My mom was always working. Just to like feed us. Make sure we were fully clothed and had everything that we needed. And ya. It hasn’t been till like 8<sup>th</sup> grade that my mom finally started spending time with us. But since I’ve been always close with my mom.”

As seen above Cristina experienced both financial and emotional difficulties. She perceived how different her life was than that of her peers in school. As she states, having both of her parents was something she “never got to have.” In this case the incarceration of one parent decreased contact with both parents. She states that she has one parent, and didn’t even get to see that one. This is an aspect of financial strain that increases emotional strain. As one parent attempts to compensate for the loss of resources and offset aspects of financial strain, the child is often forced to self-supervise or be raised by family members.

The letter writing experience, as well as other forms of non-traditional contact, that Cristina referred to was also present for many family members. Some would get phone calls and couldn’t afford to answer, some would get letters and write back, and others would receive letters and either they were kept hidden from the child until a certain age or the child chose not to open them or write back. This non-traditional form of contact between child and parent produced many emotional difficulties, and in cases of sending money, phone calls, and visitations, also created financial difficulty, that endured for much of the child’s life. Belinda was another respondent that recalled the emotional difficulties of separation and non-traditional contact, such as letter writing to an incarcerated parent, at a young age. When asked about her early experiences of non-traditional contact with her father, in this case letter writing, Belinda explained.

“I don't open them. I think they were just for my mom. I feel like they were too young when I ... I would see them. I have vague memories of my mom saying, "Oh look. Dad wrote us a note today," but she didn't say for what. She's like, "Oh look. Dad drew you a cute little photo," and stuff like that, but that's it. I never, I don't think I was old enough to

read and stuff. I could see the paper with words on it, but I don't think I ever connected them.”

Interestingly Belinda states that her mother would show her photos and notes but “she didn’t say for what.” This is an element of secrecy around parental incarceration that is discussed in the next chapter; however, it is worth mentioning that she still recalls a sense of confusion around the situation of not really knowing why the parental interaction was occurring through letters, as she states, “I don’t think I ever connected them.” I then asked Belinda if she still had the letters and what relevance they had to her life now.

Belinda answered, “Yeah. I still have them. There's a couple that are birthday cards, too. So he bought the birthday cards from in there and sent them out...I'd have them in a little drawer, but I never ...Touching them made me nervous.”

Interviewer: “Yeah. So a lot of them, you've never read them, huh?”

Belinda: “No. Just I opened one and it was a birthday one and I read like two words and broke down. I was like, ‘I can't even finish it.’”

Belinda is 20 years old and still has emotional difficulties from her separation with her father. As Belinda notes in the above passage, “touching them made me nervous,” and, “I can’t even finish it,” referring to the emotional difficulties when coming into contact with these letters. There were many emotional difficulties experienced through separation that are still present to this day. Later on in the interview Belinda even suggested that she feels it may be easier for her to let go of friends as she has trust and separation issues and is hesitant to develop close bonds with others. So much time has

passed and the separation was never fully dealt with. This has made the emotional difficulties linger. Belinda broke down in tears numerous times throughout the interview, as this was one of the first times she had ever opened up to someone about her father's incarceration. This early separation was never dealt with and at the time letters were beyond her understanding of the situation. She even recalls going to counseling yet being too young to open up.

Belinda: "My mom said she tried to take me to counseling, and I was like, I didn't want to talk so she just gave up on that."

Interviewer: "How old were you when she tried taking you?"

Belinda: "She tried to take me when I was a kid. I don't remember it. Then she tried to take me back maybe like my eighth grade year, and I still didn't want to talk, so she just left it alone."

Other respondents also noted this somewhat negative or unproductive counseling experience. After Alexis' father was released from prison they attempted to attend family counseling. Alexis was essentially banned from visiting her father on weekends and now could only be with her father in one of these counseling facilities. While she enjoyed seeing her father and playing games with him, she also did not open up to the counseling aspect of the visit as she still had confusion over the situation. When asked if any resources were given to her to deal with the parental incarceration and changing family dynamics she replied that she had to go to counseling. Alexis details, "Hmm-mm when I was younger, there was a time when they didn't let me go see him on the weekends and I think that's when I was telling you the place I want to work at hopefully when I am older,

Children's Sierra Monte Vista something like that, and it for children who parents aren't together or aren't doing good and they just have games there and a little room where you can just see your dad and your mom and hang out for a while and after that, that's it. And while you are there they also do counseling... but I honestly don't remember the counseling, I just remember one time and I did not talk at all. I didn't say anything... I just did not feel comfortable. I liked seeing him there, it was always fun."

Interviewer: "Do you remember the type of things they would tell you at the counseling?"

Alexis: "Umm I just remember going in there and she just ask me how I am doing how I am doing with all of it and I didn't know how to answer it... That was how it is. My dad would bring smarty's, like a whole bag of it and we would just play games and stuff. It was like every Friday or something like that."

As Alexis notes she "didn't say anything." There was an interesting dynamic in this study in which children resented being lied too, but also in many cases did not cope well when essentially being forced to talk. As Alexis also states she did not feel comfortable in this social location. Alexis enjoyed seeing her father in these places and playing games with him, but was not mature enough, or comfortable enough, to open up about the situation. She notes in another passage "I didn't know how to answer it," referring to questions about her current family dynamics. As noted later on in the stigma section of this study Alexis never even knew why her father was incarcerated until she found out from a friend's mother when she was 18 years old.

The separation of parent and child was a significant factor of emotional strain in this study. For example, Aaron was separated from his biological mother at birth. Aaron's mother was incarcerated immediately after his birth; he is not sure of the reasons but he assumes it was due to drug charges and having drugs in her system. Aaron was fortunate to only spend a few months in foster care before he was adopted. He is now in college, yet he has always wondered about his mom and his biological family. This has been a significant source of emotional strain for him throughout his life and through his school experiences. As he did not look like his adopted parents and they were older, he often did not attend school or athletic events with his family. He recalls the lack of reunion that often occurs when a parent comes into contact with the criminal justice system. When asked whether he thought agencies should have worked to keep him in contact with his mother he responded..

Aaron: "Yeah, I feel like they should've just, like, showed me pictures of me visiting my real Mom from time to time, or like, tell me where she's at instead of, like ... Legit, I'm just lost. I don't know who gave birth to me. It sucks, honestly. And then I just wanted to see who they are, at least. Why would they lock her up? I know she has to be out of jail now, 'cause she ain't serving 21 years, know what I mean?"

Interviewer: "Yeah, from drugs..."

Aaron: "It just kinda sucks, like, her not trying to find me, too. I feel like she doesn't wanna find me because she's embarrassed that she got locked up."

The emotional difficulties of separation are still present with Aaron at 21 years of age. He wishes the criminal justice system could have kept them together somehow, such as visits and information throughout his life. He wanted this contact even if he was staying with his adopted family. He values what the system did to give him a better life, but the secrecy and permanent separation of the system has left a lingering effect on Aaron. Having no pictures of him and his mother is something that emotionally plagues Aaron. It is a lingering question about his life that has still not yet been answered.

Many emotional difficulties were experienced during visitations and when witnessing the incidence of incarceration of their parent. Frederico was in junior high when his father was incarcerated. He witnessed as his family's cars and the house were repossessed. He began living on the side of an aunt's house and working in the fields while he was in high school. He witnessed that his mother had many difficulties dealing with depression and alcoholism after the father was taken away. He recalls being present while his father is taken away:

Frederico: "I was actually fixing the jeep outside when it happen, I went inside to use the bathroom and I came outside seeing my mom crying at the door and my dad getting hand cuffs."

Interviewer: "And what happened?"

Frederico: "I came outside and they had him handcuffs, it was a cop though, it was..."

Interviewer: "A task force or something?"

Frederico: "It was federal people...it was marshals actually."

Interviewer: "And how old were you?"

Frederico: "I was 13 or 12."

Interviewer: “Yea, and did he say anything to you, when he was in cuffs?”

Frederico: “Umm I didn’t go to him, the marshal made me stay inside the house...I wanted to go see him but I was afraid.”

Interviewer: “And how did your mom take it? Did she take it hard?”

Frederico: “She was devastated, bad.”

Frederico’s father received a sixteen-year sentence. This was the last time he saw his father. He recalls being afraid at the situation and witnessing his mother being emotionally distraught. The devastation of a family member, as mentioned above, was something that was reoccurring throughout the interviews. Of the 20 interviews, all participants reported some feeling of emotional strain and many of the participants were distraught at the separation due to the incarceration. However, the extremely difficult cases were the ones in which not only the respondent was emotionally distraught, they also had to witness their remaining family member be emotionally distraught. This is hard for children, as in many cases the parent is supposed to be the “strong” one, yet kids who may be going through confusion themselves are tasked with supporting older family members and remaining parents.

Summary: Financial and Emotional Strain

As seen in the above passages the experience of parental incarceration is very complex. Financial strain and the lack of resources in the home had a negative effect on those experiencing parental incarceration. As seen in the quantitative analysis, children of incarcerated parents are significantly more likely than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration to report being poor. How does this further affect their social mobility? Participants in the qualitative study on parental incarceration provided

numerous examples of the effect of financial strain on their lives. These included the immediate need to pursue employment to offset financial strain, the inability to pursue education due to lack of financial resources, the absence of the remaining parent due to their attempt to offset strain, and overall lack of adequate living standards. The lack of resources transferred to other areas of the respondents' lives. Some recalled not attending school due to lack of clean clothing and housing. This strengthens the argument that parental incarceration should be acknowledged and these children must be identified as an at-risk population. Failure in other social arenas may be due to the extraction of resources from families and overall effects this has on the child's mobility.

As noted above, all respondents experienced some sort of emotional strain. The intersection between emotional and financial strain was relevant. When a parent was remaining the children often witnessed this parent being emotional distraught, but due to financial strain also had to deal with emotional distance of the remaining parent who was often working long hours. Participants also recall high levels of stress in regards to finances and lack of resources in relation to the incarceration. Again it is an argument of this study that parental incarceration, and the concentrated incarceration of groups, leads to an experience that transcends that of urban poverty, and children coming from these homes will have more adverse experiences than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration. The emotional difficulties outlined in this study were important in that they were long lasting. Respondents recalled many emotions such as depression and sadness, anger and resentment, and nervousness and anxiety. Many of the respondents were brought to tears during the interview and had lingering emotional effects. The

overall sadness of separation, a separation that often persisted post-incarceration, was apparent.

### **Residential Instability and Familial Restructuring**

Residential instability and familial restructuring is closely related with the prior themes of financial and emotional strain. There seemed to be a relationship between financial strain and residential instability, and also that of the restructuring of families amplifying experiences of emotional strain. Of the twenty participants interviewed, 35% (7 out of 20) reported experiencing residential instability, and 55% (11 out of 20) reported experiencing familial restructuring. Residential instability was particularly deleterious to well-being due to the effects residential instability have on success in other realms, such as education and employment. Those who were often moving, living in unsure circumstances, or who had nowhere to live at all, suffered in other areas of life. Residential instability also resulted in children attending many different schools in a short period of time, or in some cases not being able to attend school at all. Some respondents recalled going to more than five elementary schools and two high schools. This made attachment to the school and peer development difficult. Belinda recalls some of her difficulties attending many schools due to residential instability and the incarceration of her father...

Belinda: “Yeah. My freshman year, it was rough for me to stay in class because I was like, ‘Well, I don't want to be here,’ so for any excuse I had I would leave class. I had probably a hundred and something absences in total my freshman year. After that, I got

better...I hated my whole freshman year. I had like one friend and that was my cousin. I literally hung out with my cousin every day..."

Interviewer: "So when you were young, what elementary school did you go to?"

Belinda: "I moved around a lot. I went..."

Interviewer: "Why'd you move around a lot? Is that because like you saying you were just always..."

Belinda: "I think it was my mom's stability at my time. House hopping. We would stay at the houses for a while, but we moved around a lot. I went to Burney. I went to Washington. I went to East Clovis and Baird. I went to a lot... I always remember we never lived in our own house. It was always like an apartment, fixing up a cousin or aunt's garage and then having that room, you know?"

Interviewer: "That's a lot of elementary schools."

Belinda: "Seven or eight. In high school I went to Sunnyside and then I finally landed at East."

As seen above Belinda recalls the residential instability of constantly moving places, she calls this "house hopping." They would rent apartments, fix up garages, and essentially stay wherever they could. This consistent movement placed Belinda in different school zones and districts, which forced her to attend many schools. As I argued above, this constant relocation made peer development and school attachment difficult. Belinda recalls hating her freshman year and having over 100 absences. She also recalls

how limited her peer groups were with the statement, “I had like one friend, and that was my cousin.”

Homelessness was an advanced experience of residential instability that many families experienced. Sometimes this homelessness was short lived and sometimes it persisted for years or more. Respondents recall difficulty in attending school, inability to concentrate due to worry, and suffering in educational progress. Respondents recall living in hotels while parents were incarcerated, losing the houses they did have, living with family members, and living in small apartments and often bouncing from place to place.

Respondents also recalled familial restructuring. The result was the deconstruction of the current family structure and the replacement with a new one. This happened in many ways. Many children were permanently separated from their family members due to changing family dynamics. Some reported living in the foster care system and subsequently never being reunited with their family. Others lived with the remaining parent and that parent re-partnered, some had to live with grandparents, and overall many recalled having non-traditional family experiences for many years after the incarceration.

One aspect of this was marriage or re-partnering. Respondents recalled that when a father was incarcerated, they would usually struggle financially with the mother. In these cases the mother would re-partner and essentially “offset” the strain of resource deprivation. In these cases more finances were coming into the house, yet the children experience different difficulties, mostly emotional in nature. In the cases of maternal incarceration, respondents were often tasked with taking care of themselves or looking to other family members to fulfill the parental role, such as grandmothers and grandfathers.

Familial restructuring in some cases also resulted in the permanent separation of parent and child. In these cases the child experienced restructuring into a single parent household.

Roxy was in her early teens when her father was incarcerated. His incarceration was a result of receiving stolen property from Roxy's uncles. He was unaware the property was stolen and purchased it from the uncles but was still charged with the crime regardless. As the father was in jail the family went through severe residential instability: they lost their house, they had to move from house to house, and they ultimately lived in a van for much time. These experiences made it difficult for Roxy and her siblings to attend school regularly. Roxy's father had been working. His removal from the home left the family with little cash and unable to take care of their basic needs.

Roxy: "We were living in Washington at that time and where we were living at was the housing that was provided by the company on work. So since, he was incarcerated he wasn't able to go back to the season and back to work. So, he lost, we lost that home. His employer didn't want to take him back. So, we didn't have a home. They took everything out of the home and we didn't get our stuff back-- we didn't get our stuff back. We were in California during this time and we were living with family."

Interviewer: "So, like all your clothes and everything?"

Roxy: "Yeah everything. We didn't have anything at that time and we were homeless."

Interviewer: "And so, like you guys never went back to Washington?"

Roxy: "Yeah, we did. We did cause my dad tried to find work here something that was like faster but because of the ties with the last name and just everything he wasn't able to. He tried getting a job like a season job working in the grapes, strawberries and stuff like

but he could do that for some time. But at the end of the day, he wasn't able to make enough money to get out of the grandparents.”

Interviewer: “So, they came and got him and you guys became homeless, where did you stay did you like bounce place to place?”

Roxy: “We went from place to place and we had a van. So yeah, it was me and my two siblings, my two brothers. It was three of us.”

Interviewer: “How was that?”

Roxy: “Well it was tough. And then we were out of school for that time. And they tried to-- we started going to school for a little bit in Livingston. But it was tough, we didn't like... Like the poverty.”

As Roxy recalls the residential instability was “tough” on her and her family. While living in a van and essentially becoming homeless, Roxy and her siblings stopped going to school. As Roxy recalls it was the “poverty” that made life and school attendance difficult. Roxy went on to recall how long the residential instability lasted and the effects it had on her family members...

Roxy: “That was like I wanna say a good two years that it took my dad to get for us to like get back on our feet.”

Interviewer: “So, you guys were living homeless basically while he was incarcerated and then he comes out...”

Roxy: “And we were still homeless.”

She goes on to talk about her experiences of homelessness and how that affected the schooling of her and her young brothers and the emotions that were present at the time...

Roxy: "Yeah, fear, scared. You know I remember there was a lot of shame and a lot of discrimination but it was actually internal too because it was family. It was family more than anything and then we went to school and that continued and that's why my mom pulled us back from school because we were just getting bullied."

Interviewer: "People at school would know about it?"

Roxy: "Yeah, they knew that we were homeless and you know. So, my mom didn't want us to deal with that."

As Roxy recalls the residential instability produced stigma and difficulties on her life. The location in which Roxy and her siblings were attending school was a small town in which word of mouth was a relevant factor. The poverty Roxy and her siblings experienced was advanced due to the parental incarceration and lack of resources to the family, such as inadequate clean clothing. Lack of such necessities led to experiences of bullying by peers. Roxy then goes on to talk about the attempt to transition back into school and her siblings' subsequent reduced educational attainment of not graduating high school.

Interviewer: "Was it difficult transitioning back in the school, did you guys lose any time?"

Roxy: "I, for me it wasn't hard. But for my brothers, yeah. For my two brothers, it was hard. So, I mean we were still young and I always liked school. I still like tried it and like read and do math problems here and there and stuff and I would like study off of my cousin like her book when she would come home and do her homework. I would like picking up the books. So, for me, transitioning back was not hard. But for my brothers it was."

Interviewer: "And yeah, so did they graduate high school and stuff?"

Roxy: "No, they didn't."

Interviewer: "No, they didn't?"

Roxy: "No, they have their GED. They had to go back and do it. But my brother was sent to a continuation school."

Residential instability is an experience that is extremely difficult on the family unit as a whole. Many of the respondents, such as Roxy, had stable homes prior to the incarceration. Roxy and her family not only lost their home, they lost all of their belongings inside the home when the father was incarcerated. This is a very difficult experience of not only losing a parent and a loved family member, but also losing everything one owns. As Roxy recalls, it took them years to get back on their feet after the incarceration and the trajectory of her brother's lives were altered.

Kyle experienced the incarceration of both of his mother and father. They were both incarcerated for a drug offense early on in his life. Like many drug users, they used drugs together. Therefore, the likelihood of their arrests occurring simultaneously increases. This occurred with Kyle's parents. They were both driving in the car and

possessed drugs, and therefore were both arrested and placed in jail. They were subsequently arrested numerous times. When they were incarcerated no one was assigned to take care of Kyle and his siblings. The result was a pre-teen, Kyle, and his older brother being responsible for taking care of his younger siblings. Kyle recalls being in a house with his siblings and every couple of days the grandfather would come by and check to see if they were ok, sometimes bringing food. The house had little structure due to the parents' absence and no social services ever provided assistance.

Kyle: "Umm first reaction was. I started crying because we were the only ones at the house. We was old enough to watch ourselves but we was it was just sad to hear that they got locked up, and we had to take care of ourselves. Our grandpa was helping us. So he helped us until they got out."

Interviewer: "So you were living with him for a while? Or he came to live with you guys?"

Kyle: "Well he would come over and see how we was doing, sometimes he would take us over to his house..uhhh cause before they got locked up. They was always gone. We had the house all to ourselves. We never knew what they were doing, but they would always bring back food for us. And all this and that. And uhhh but it also affects the household when they got locked up because we didn't have food, well we had food but really didn't have food. the bills and uhh they also lost cars vehicles."

Interviewer: "So they also lost cars and stuff?"

Kyle: "Yea."

Interviewer: "Were those like confiscated by the police? Or they just couldn't pay for it?"

Kyle: “Yea it was basically confiscated.”

As seen above Kyle had many adverse experiences when his parents were taken. This resulted in a lack of structure where the grandfather would come and check on them sometimes, but also resulted in the confiscation of the family vehicle, due to it being impounded during a “drug stop”. Kyle was subject to additional and intersectional forms of disadvantage that transcend beyond that of simple poverty.

Kyle grew up and was also eventually incarcerated for an assault and drunk and disorderly case as an adult. In this sense he became a second-generation offender and was incarcerated like his mother and step-father. Kyle is now attending community college and trying to get his life back on track.

Interviewer: “How do you think with your incarceration will affect you? Do you think it’ll have any impact on your life or anything like that?”

Kyle: “I mean it can. I can have an effect on my life. Its just crazy that umm while I was locked up. It was just crazy because I was locked up with some killers. People who were doing life, or were gonna do life, so I thought I was gonna be in there for a long time. It kinda affected me, but then again it kinda, kinda it gave me experience inside jail. And its pretty crazy in there.”

Victor experienced the incarceration of both his mother and his stepfather. Victor experienced severe residential instability. When his father was arrested for drugs his family was subsequently evicted from their home, this was a home they owned at the

time and lost. Victor's mother was then incarcerated for petty shoplifting (stealing diapers, food, etc.), and her repeated offenses resulted in her incarceration. When Victor left for the military his 15-year-old brother was left living at the hotel. Victor did eventually establish social mobility, but this only occurred by leaving. His brothers and sisters were not so lucky; most are stuck in jobs with little to no mobility. Victor left and joined the military and this provided an avenue for him to attend college later on in life and find a good career. Although in this case upward mobility was achieved for Victor, he was the only one in his family.

Interviewer: "So your biological father was incarcerated?"

Victor: "No, no I'm sorry, my step father. My biological father and I weren't really speaking. Because I was kinda kicked out the house. So I wasn't trying to reconnect with him. Even throughout the more immediate concerns my family was facing. Being evicted. So my mom found a friend that she could stay with. But they could only accommodate so many people. So my brother and I had to stay at a hotel until I went off to the military. So I joined the military, and pretty much left my brother living at the hotel."

Interviewer: "How old was he?"

Victor: "He was fifteen."

Interviewer: "Fifteen so you were about 18.? So stepfather was incarcerated for kinda a drug offense, and your mother and it kinda left you guys homeless?"

Victor: "Yea and she was in and out for shoplifting too at that time. So I was watching the kids umm during the summer break before I left for the military in September. And

my mother came back so she was released. And then yea. She was able to live with her friend. But the older ones. Me and my brother had to live in a hotel until they could work things out.”

Interviewer: “So when did, so you went off to the military, when did they get out of the hotel, so you remember them telling you?”

Victor: “I remember being in a hotel for a couple weeks before I left for the military, it was all really all of a sudden. Dory, this person that we were supposed to stay with couldn’t accommodate all of us. Even though we were all together at one time. I think one time her son came home for a visit. He was in the Marines. And after that it was like two of you have to leave. So the two oldest ones. And so yea.”

Similarly, the incarceration of Victor’s mother led to severe residential instability and resulted in a young teen being responsible for even younger teens. Victor was forced to live in a hotel with his younger brother while still in high school. Victor found his upward mobility through departure from the family. As he left to the military he subsequently was able to pursue education after military enrollment, however, the siblings he left behind did not experience the same fate and 3 of his 4 siblings also experienced incarceration later on in life.

Early on in Alexis’ life her father was incarcerated, and he was subsequently incarcerated numerous times throughout Alexis’ adolescence, for multiple DUIs and drug use/possession. The family struggled while he was gone. The mother ended up getting a divorce from the father and Alexis and her mother resided in a small house for the first couple of years. Eventually Alexis’ mother remarried and they were able to move into a

house with the stepfather. Alexis recalls the tension at home and feeling out of place, or not at ease in the home. She would often go stay with her father but due to his incarcerations this was no longer a possibility. This familial restructuring and residential instability took a toll on Alexis over the years. She eventually moved out of the house as a teenager.

Alexis: I think it affected me in a way I wanted him there (*referring to her father*). Me and him did always have a good relationship it was never bad but I get most of my qualities from my dad like he is not the type to argue, he is easy to talk to, so I always felt like when I needed a break from home I could go over there...so when he get locked up, I didn't have that and I hate being at home cause that's when me and my stepdad weren't getting along ..so I would always keep to myself for awhile but that was really it.

She goes on further about her interactions with her stepfather while her father was absent..

Alexis: "Me and him used to fight all the time and straight up. like yelling cussing at each other. He'd used to tell me to get out of his house or like bring stuff up about my dad. Tryin' to tell me I'm your dad. Tellin me I'm been there for you and stuff which he has. Like even though my dad is messed up. I don't know it's confusing..."

Interviewer: "Yea... and he would tell you to get out? How old were you?"

Alexis: "I was in my teens..."

In this quote above we see that Alexis experienced changing family dynamics that made her uncomfortable in the home setting. This resulted in her moving out as a teenager and essentially becoming “homeless” during her high school years. This shows a combination of family restructuring and residential instability in that the restructuring of the family, due to the separation of incarceration, led to Alexis having unsure living conditions. She recalls being cursed at by her stepfather and essentially being told to “get out” in a time when residential stability is extremely important for educational success. The continual incarcerations of her father throughout her life course led to negative family experiences, which led to residential instability, in important years of Alexis’ life.

### **Summary: Residential Instability and Familial Restructuring**

As noted in the quantitative data, those who experience parental incarceration are more likely to have moved within the last year and are less likely to be living with their biological mother or father than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration. How does residential instability and changing family dynamics affect this population?

Many of the participants in the qualitative study experienced residential instability. This residential instability also affected them in other areas of life, such as in attending school. Some respondents recalled not finishing school and siblings not finishing high school due to the parental incarceration and residential instability. Severe episodes of residential instability were homelessness. In these cases, mostly for a short period of time, the respondents either had nowhere to stay or would essentially house hop until they could get their own place. While this was going on, children were often forced to go to multiple schools or stopped going to school altogether. Attending many schools

had negative effects on peer group development and school attachment. Even when respondents did not become homeless, moving multiple times and living in unstable conditions negatively affected the respondents. The emotional feeling of not having somewhere to go to call home, not being able to bring friends over because of living circumstances, and the overall month-to-month insecurity was difficult on children.

Familial restructuring was also significant for children experiencing parental incarceration. Many of the respondents were living with the incarcerated parent prior to the incarceration, but did not live with that parent after the incarceration. When children were living in a single parent home these children were essentially left to self-supervise, be supervised by family members, or were sometimes placed in the foster care system and never reunited with their family members. The changing family dynamics were associated with aspects of emotional strain. There was sadness over separation, confusion, discomfort at new family arrangements, and fear of the situation. Utilizing both the quantitative and qualitative data it can be argued that parental incarceration plays a significant role in restructuring families, and even among the disadvantaged, parental incarceration reduces the likelihood of living with the biological parent even after the parent is released. In this sense mass incarceration plays a role in the weakening of family structures in primarily disadvantaged communities.

### **Transference of Stigma:**

Throughout the interviews participants experienced the transference of stigma in many ways. This research article defines the transference of stigma as: when one person's crime is held as a representation of another's moral worth. This transference of stigma can be felt or can be experienced. Meaning, respondents often noted that they felt

stigmatized due to family history, these feelings of stigma made them uncomfortable and they would often extract themselves from various situations. This transference of stigma can also be expressed in life-course experiences. For example some respondents experienced blocked mobility pathways due to the criminal stigmatization of a family member. In these cases employment was restricted due to the parent's criminal history. These respondents never committed a crime, yet were stigmatized and experienced intergenerational demobilization due to the stigma placed on the first generation. Other experiences of stigma embodied the loss of employment and the probing into one's character for eligibility to serve in certain roles. Whole families can be interpreted as criminal and may be excluded from social networks also. This section incorporates the stories of Amorie, Alexis, Victor, and Mary. These were not the only respondents who recalled experiencing stigma. Of the 20 interviews conducted, 60% (12 out of 20) of the participants reported feeling stigmatized in some way: these occurrences came through barred employment opportunities, negative experiences with peers, negative experiences with extended family, and other feelings of shame as a result of stigma. For this sample, the majority of respondents expressed that they felt some form of stigmatization due to the incarceration of a family member.

Amorie's mother received numerous charges for petty theft. Amorie went through the experience of bailing her mother out numerous times and experiencing somewhat of a "role reversal." Amorie states that this was the "most awkward moment of her life." The family would come together to try to prevent future incidents and Amorie was sometimes tasked with watching her mother at the store and recalls how serious of a responsibility this was. She recalls bailing her mother out of jail as a teenager..

Amorie: “Umm, uhh, so, yeah we went to that and I was like, okay, so where’s my mom? Do we see her now and they were like, no this is just the bail bonds place and now we have to go actually pick her up and I was like, am I gonna see her handcuffed.....am I gonna see her everything like that. I was thinking that. Ah, so we go pick her up and when we pick her up, my mom, she was just like, silent. It was the most awkward moment of my life.”

Interviewer: “Yeah.”

Amorie: “I’ve never, how does she explain to you know, her youngest daughter? it was just the guilt. What every parent tells you not to get into.”

The main transference of stigma came from the label given to the mother. The numerous charges for petty theft left a mark on her record. This label was later partially held against Amorie’s family. Amorie’s sister obtained a Masters degree in criminal justice from an accredited state university in California. As the background checks for employment in areas of criminal justice are in some cases rather rigorous, Amorie’s sister ended up having to answer for her mother’s crimes. The upward mobility of education and an advanced degree were essentially rendered useless due to the transference of stigma. In the job interviews the mother’s infractions would continually come up. Amorie’s sister is now forced to search for another occupation or receive an advanced degree in another area. Amorie recalls this as being “not fair,” due to the hard work and clean record of her sister. The transference of stigma and labels from the “criminal” to the “non-criminal” can have affects on life–course mobility. Amorie’s sister started from

the community college, kept a clean record, worked hard, and achieved multiple degrees but still experienced stigmatization. Amorie recalls her experiences having to watch her mother, and her sister's stigmatization resulting in barred employment opportunities.

Amorie: So like you know, just keeping in contact, make sure I have an eye on her, but it has affected her (*referring to her sister*) because umm, she says that when she goes to interviews, she gets through the whole thing and then when she goes into the background check in the interviews, they always bring that up, that and umm, like different cases with my brother. From back when he was having troubles in high school too

Interviewer: "So your sister got her masters CJ, from where?"

Amorie: "Uh, Stanislaus."

Interviewer: So she got that and then she's been searching for jobs with it?

Amorie: "Mhmm." (affirmative)

Interviewer: "And umm, they bring up your mother's record?"

Amorie: "Mhmm and she, says, every time that they bring it up, she says that she doesn't get a call back or like...she doesn't get that job, so that's why we think it's because of that. They just bring it up and honestly, of course she gonna say ya. Obviously I know it happened, but umm, my sister she, she probably has the cleanest record, but, there's, with her, nothing. She's always been straight to school, work. Everything, so there's nothing on her part."

Interviewer: "That would make her ineligible for these jobs or anything like that?"

Amorie: “Yeah, so why, something that...someone else did that you can’t control is, is influencing whether she can get a job or not?”

Interviewer: “And how does she feel, does she, does she feel like she has to give up on this line of work or does-?”

Amorie: “No, she still tries because, I mean that’s what she studied and she’s really into that. I think actually, she, she’s going back to school now and then she’s actually trying to get umm the (*masters*) for counseling.”

Interviewer: “Mhmm”

Amorie: “So she’s gonna be a counselor now and it’s probably because she hasn’t gotten the job she wanted, but umm, she, she’ll never admit it.”

Interviewer: “Yeah.”

Amorie: “She, to my mom, she will never admit it.”

Interviewer: “She’ll never tell her, that’s why?. Yeah that’s rough then. You know, you go all the way to get a master’s in CJ and then they try not let you use it.”

Amorie: “Mhmm...And my sister, she went through a lot because umm, well she started off at the community college. She wasn’t I guess, she, had the best grades... but, uh, so she had to start off from the very bottom at, at the community college and like eventually she worked her way up to the Master’s Program here, but uh, she’s like I said, she’s always been super independent and everything she has, she got it herself. My mom wouldn’t even help her with things or she wouldn’t even ask for help.”

Interviewer: “And how do you feel about that,.umm, what they did to your sister because of that?”

Amorie: "I don't think it's fair, because if anyone deserves uh, a good job like that, that would be my sister."

As the quote above shows, the transference of stigma of criminality may become a barrier to employment for those who themselves have refrained from criminal activity. In this case, educational attainment was not enough to combat the stigma of coming from a "criminal" family. Thus, the mother's incarcerations, and subsequent record, became a master status for Alexis's sister when searching for her employment with her Master's degree in criminal justice.

This transference of stigma and employment occurred also with Aaron. As stated earlier, Aaron's mother was incarcerated after his birth and he was subsequently adopted. His older sister and two of his adopted brothers have felony records. For this reason Aaron's niece was denied a job as a police dispatcher. She has her AA degree and has no record herself. However, the felony record of her mother and uncles created a situation in which the house was "red flagged" and she was subsequently denied employment. Aaron, as a current criminal justice student fears this may also occur to him when seeking employment. He is considering changing his last name to alleviate some of the stigma present.

Aaron: "Yeah, and then, we [Aaron and his niece] just always talked about it when I come home to visit. And then, one time she's all, "You better be careful because I got denied, because your house is red flagged, blah blah." And I was all, "What do you mean? What do you mean red flagged?" And then she said, "It's cause of my Mom's record, she put their mailing address," and all this stuff....And then Frank, he's my

younger brother, he was charged with something, and then Doug. I was all, "I don't think it will affect me because I don't really count them, and like, I live here." And she's all, "Well, you better be careful." I was all, "Well, alright, my bad."

Interviewer: "And your niece, has she stayed out of crimes herself? She's..."

Aaron: "Yeah, she hasn't been charged for anything."

Interviewer: "Yeah, so now it's her Mother's stuff's being used against her. How do you feel about that?"

Aaron: "That sucks."

Mary experienced intergenerational cycles of incarceration. In 1977 her father was incarcerated for driving a car that was used in a robbery. He was sentenced to prison. His son, Mary's brother, was also incarcerated in early adulthood and received a prison sentence. Before his incarceration he had a child. This child essentially grew up in foster care, her name is Naomi (Mary's niece). Naomi had a rough life in foster care and subsequently ended up in a mental health facility as an adult. She became pregnant after a night away from the facility. As a baby could not live in such a place, this baby was also destined for foster care. Mary attempted to intervene on the baby's behalf. Mary has never been incarcerated as an adult and has raised three college graduate children and one adopted nephew. Mary petitioned to adopt the baby in 2017 so it would not have to go into foster care as Naomi did. Her petition was denied due to the record of the father, from the driver from 1977. It seemed to the State that Mary raising three college graduate children did not matter as much as the record of the father. Mary's father was bedridden and on dialysis at the time and in her care. The stigma of an old crime representing a

family led to this baby not going to a good home and instead into foster care. Mary is continuing her fight for the adoption and hopes for the best. Mary recalls Naomi first visiting her father in prison, her subsequent life trajectory, and the battle for the baby.

Mary: “Yes and I feel that he’s in no condition. It wasn’t a violent crime, but he’s in no condition. What I am giving my dad is convalescent care; if he was in a convalescent home I could of kept the baby. Because he’s with me, I couldn’t have the baby unless they do a criminal waiver and I don’t know how long that could take. But in the mean time the baby has to be in the foster home, which I don’t think is fair because I don’t have no crimes or anything. I don’t think it is fair on the baby I don’t think its fair on me that they are going to withhold her for something my dad did 37, 38 years ago and he paid the price for it and we can’t get the baby...I told them I told the social worker, that’s so wrong that you.... the person who is taking care of the dad and you have to make me choose between my dad and the baby when they both actually need me. My dad is bed bound, I’ll have to change him and he has dialysis and I told him he is in his last stages of kidney failure and he is in no danger to himself or anyone else around him. They act like if it was a violent crime. And I said it is not fair that you would let me have the baby if he was in the convalescent home. it would be no problem because my daughter doesn’t have a crime in her record. And I don’t have anything. And yet I could have the baby, it could be here if I just put my dad in the convalescent home... I just feel like I shouldn’t have to do that.”

Interviewer: “And umm you really want the baby to be with family?”

Mary: “Yes, instead of having the baby out there, sometimes they have good foster homes and sometimes they don’t. You know, instead of her being raised by strangers why not let her be raised by people who love her.. like I have raised my little nephew from 10 through 13 years old. And I have successful kids, that should say something we try to teach our family the best to be good. How do you say it, outstanding people.”

As we see through the above experience, there were many intergenerational effects of the incarceration(s). First Mary’s father is incarcerated, his son (Mary’s brother) is also then incarcerated, he has a baby who experiences many negative issues growing up and after foster care she end ups in an asylum, after becoming pregnant she has a baby who also went to foster care. This is a fourth generation negative experience of incarceration, and due to the transference of stigma from the 1<sup>st</sup> generation, Mary, possessing no adult record, is stigmatized.

Aurora also recalled a similar foster care experience. Her father was incarcerated early on in her life and had two felonies. Aurora’s mother was doing social work at the time and taking care of the elderly. When Aurora’s aunt was incarcerated her children were taken into the foster care system. Aurora’s mother was ineligible to take care of the children, and unable do foster care herself, because of the felonies Aurora’s father had obtained years prior.

Aurora: “Yeah, my cousin’s mom, she was always incarcerated for selling drugs, so a lot of times they would be sent to foster care, so my mom has tried to get them a couple

times, because they were at our house and he was, but they were unable to because he had two felonies.”

Interviewer: “So because your dad's record, your mom couldn't get them in the house? You found out recently?”

Aurora: “Yeah, we barely found that out. We, I was little, I didn't realize it but now that I think about it, and I asked my mom about it, she said that because my dad had a felony, they wouldn't allow the kids to stay there.”

This exclusion of Aurora’s mother as a potential foster parent was due to a crime she had not commit. The family would still try to help and would often supervise the children and throw events such as birthday parties with them, but in the State’s eyes the family held a mark of stigma. Subsequently the children, Aurora’s cousins, had many different foster care placements throughout the years and did not have a stable life. Some of the children even grew up and became second-generation prisoners.

Aurora: “Yeah, I think my parents would take them school shopping. I know one of my cousins, the first birthday party they ever had, my mom threw for them...One of them was always in and out of juvenile hall, but the other three, yeah, they were all living with my aunt, they would always be at my house.”

Interviewer: “And how are they now?”

Aurora: “How are they now? I don't know, I don't talk to them. I know one of them is pregnant, one of them is in prison.”

Interviewer: “One of them is in prison?”

Aurora: “Yeah, all of her kids, they're in trouble somehow, even if it's just jail. It's like all of them have been in trouble.”

Another respondent Alexis recalls a stigmatic experience of finding out about one of her father's crime from a friend's mother. Some aspects of the transference of stigma were in experiences where participants essentially felt they were part of an out-group due to their parent's incarceration and family last name. In many cases in this study, a last name associated with criminal activity was seen as a mark against the individual.

For much of her childhood the reasons for his absences were not fully known by Alexis. Alexis recalls a stigmatic and uncomfortable experience of first finding out about her father's drug from a stranger. Prior to this she had little knowledge. She was identified by her friend's mother by her last name. Alexis immediately felt uncomfortable hearing the details of her father's offense, and felt a stigma that she would be perceived as someone who has a lot of problems, due to her father's drug use.

Alexis: “I actually didn't know that until a year and a half ago because it's a guy that comes to school actually, he was coaching my brothers for football in Turlock and me and him were really close like just friends and he told me about his family stuff, girl problems or whatever and I ended up going to go to his house to pick up my brothers because he was close to my brothers too and I went over there and the mom was like you look familiar and I was like really, and she was like what your name so I told her,

\*\*\*\*\*, the 18 year old girl end up being her family...she was like oh I remember your dad I took a bat to him, I was just like what? I went home and asked my mom and she was like yeah that's true. And I was like damn. I never knew and I still feel like there's a lot that I don't know. My mom would never tell. It was mainly my dad that would tell me the crazy stuff that he did."

Interviewer: "And how was it when it was someone else that was telling you about your dad, how did it make you feel?"

Alexis: "Umm I didn't like it...it was just uncomfortable, it was embarrassing because it was like my dad and then they're telling me so it just like...I don't want them to be like oh I'm sorry your dad is like that you know like I don't know."

Interviewer: "You think it made them think differently about you or something?"

Alexis: "Yea think differently about me or something, think that I have like I don't know. Like I don't have hecka problems or anything."

The circumstances around Victor's mother's incarceration were described earlier. In this passage Victor discusses the effects of stigma on his family as a whole. This transference of stigma resulted in their exclusion from a close-knit ethnic community. In this case the incarceration "solidified" their position as not like their middle-class counterparts. He recalls feeling a loss of family due to the stigmatization surrounding the incarcerations.

Victor: "I felt it [stigma] in my family. Particularly from her own other family members. Right so. Like really losing face to the family. Like bringing a bad reputation to the

family name. So I think she's had a lot of problems with her parents and half siblings. umm and uhh you know I guess we kinda my own community. We use to be such a large community. The Filipino America community is huge in Vallejo because it use to be a naval base. And just kinda the history of migration. Umm to Northern California around Hercules, Vallejo and Rodeo. It was mostly like a middle class immigrant experience. And we didn't really fit that. So I think that the incarceration really reinforced that. That we are really different from my grandfather from his kids with my mom stepmother and if we do get together it's not really authentic. I mean we may have to go to funerals where we may see each other again and there is this talk about you know we are all this one big family and all together. And then two weeks later they don't call and uhh and you know I just kinda didn't dealt with that stuff. But my mom would. She would like continue to try and see if people wanted to talk. If she could lend some money or something. I was like mom don't even bother with them. But she did what she had to do. And yea just think that its really a sore thumb to the family. And family was such an important part to all of us growing up experiences. And to not have that anymore due to the incarcerations. Uhh that I think we as a family internalized that."

The above passage reveals elements of the transference of stigma and secondary labeling. The community perceived Victor's mother negatively due to her incarceration, this is a secondary reaction to the offense committed, and due to this reaction toward the mother, the entire family internalized the stigma of being somewhat different their middle class counterparts. As Victor states he felt the stigma "in his family," and this was mostly felt through the reactions of external family members.

### **Summary of Findings: The Transference of Stigma**

The transference of stigma was an important element of demobilization. The transference of stigma occurred through secondary labeling in which society is essentially having a social reaction to family member as well as the offender. In some cases there is an actual event in which the participant is deemed as not worthy of an element of social advancement due to the crimes of someone in their family. This occurred multiple times throughout the study. For example, in the cases of law enforcement background checks can be very rigorous. In cases in this study, college graduate, and soon to be college graduate, respondents were denied employment due to the criminal history of a parent. This is an impactful element of demobilization in that when living in areas of concentrated incarceration it is very unlikely that one will not experience some form of household incarceration. As the parental incarceration rate is disproportionately high for black and Latino youth (Western and Pettit 2010), this means what statistically speaking black and Latino youth are more likely to be ineligible for jobs simply due to the family they were born into, not necessarily from their direct action throughout their life. This transference of stigma in regards to employment was also present elsewhere, such as restrictions in being a foster care provider, the restrictions to elements of law enforcement due to family history is a transference of stigma that must be documented in the literature as the police force in many states is disproportionately white. This disproportionality is often justified with the claim that black and Latino youth are less eligible, but this study highlights how difficult it is to be eligible, even when a youth actively refrains from crime or drug use.

There were also experiences of discomfort and exclusion that were not necessarily overt. In these cases the individual felt as they were part of an out-group but was never necessarily told they are excluded. This transference of stigma may also be dangerous in that family members may begin to exclude themselves from potential social networks due to these stigmatic experiences. This may result in the individual reducing family networks, friendship networks, and overall reducing potential resources that may be available. As a quote from Victor says, “I think we as family internalized that.” This internalization of stigma is an important aspect of labeling theory. Labeling theory argues that the labeling of ex-offenders as criminal increases the likelihood that they will be solidified into a life of crime. Essentially, it is their labeling that promotes their recidivism. This study helps advance and broaden this idea of labeling theory. It can be argued that the labeling of a head family member, such as a parent, can also alter the remaining statuses and identities of the immediate family members. The altering of their identity may reduce their effectiveness in conventional society, even when they are not explicitly excluded.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

There are over 70 million Americans with a criminal record and over 30 million children living in a home in which at least one parent has a criminal record (Vallas et al. 2015; Fredericksen and Omli 2016). The experience of parental incarceration is found to be detrimental to overall social mobility of children attached to incarcerated or “labeled” parents. Utilizing in-depth qualitative interviews this research study argues that intergenerational demobilization of children occurs through three mechanisms: Severe financial and emotional strain, residential instability and familial restructuring, and the

transference of stigma. As those with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parents may experience strain, instability, and stigma, these combine to reduce the overall success of this population in society. Their demobilization is embodied through lower levels of educational attainment than their counterparts and reduced employment opportunities due to their family history. Family members who were able to find material success had to show amazing resilience to combat these negative effects placed on them and their households. The societal impacts of this study are vast in that parental incarceration must be incorporated into studies of intergenerational mobility as this variable can produce many outcomes that limit societal success. The instability, strain, and stigma experienced when a parent is incarcerated can further demobilize youth with limited mobility pathways to begin with.

Examples of the transference of stigma were prevalent in the study. Some were socially excluded simply due to word of mouth, bad reputation, or family last name. Others, were actually excluded from sectors of the work force due to family background checks in which the record of someone in the family is held as a representation of how hireable the individual was. This stigmatization of whole groups, communities, or families is dangerous in that it promotes more criminality than safety. If safety is the end goal of incarceration, then it can be concluded that stigmatic punishments of offenders and their families is actually serving the opposite purpose of this goal. Parental incarceration has been found to produce many of the factors, such as emotional and financial deprivation that can be a pre-requisite to future criminality. Policies of punishment in the United States must understand that there are intergenerational consequences of mass incarceration that expand across many realms. This mass extraction of parental resources

can limit opportunities and mobility of youth in disadvantaged communities can initiate intergenerational cycles of incarceration and low educational attainment. Corrections should be more corrective, and exclusionary punishments beyond confinement do not serve that purpose.

A key contribution of this research study is taking the approach of interviewing adult children who have been separated from a parent due to their contact with the criminal justice system at some point in their life. As these respondents are already into adulthood this study analyzes the long-term effects of mass incarceration on intergenerational mobility. This is of societal importance as there are millions of children with a parent currently behind bars, and there are millions more who's parents have a stigmatic labeling that can have negative consequences on their social status. These children are in many cases disadvantaged to begin with as the population experiencing parental incarceration is disproportionately comprised of racial minorities and the urban poor. Society must be conscious of the mass demobilization of youth in highly criminalized communities, as the effects found in this study may be amplified on a much wider scale. Education literature should also be conscious of these effects when discussing the educational mobility of groups that experience higher levels of incarceration, such as poor black and Latino families. The financial and emotional strain, accompanied with residential instability, which accompanies parental incarceration makes it increasingly difficult for children from these regions to experience success in education, and as education is one of the best methods to reduce criminality among populations, it can be argued that mass incarceration plays a counterintuitive role to

public safety by reducing opportunities and resources for success, for already disadvantaged children.

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### Chapter 3

#### Secrecy and “Googling” Parents: The unique experience of parental incarceration

### Abstract

Parental incarceration in the United States has drastically increased since the 1980's. As there is much stigma around incarceration and the majority of incarcerated individuals are parents, it is important to identify the effects of this unique form of parent-child separation. This paper argues that parental incarceration is more secretive and deceptive than other forms of separation, and this is mostly due to the stigma around the incarceration. This paper also argues that children of incarcerated parents seek information and sometimes reconnect with their parent using new technology and online platforms such as Google. This paper utilizes qualitative data from family members of incarcerated individuals (N=20) in California, and discusses instances when parental incarceration is shrouded in secrecy, and cases when children grow up and "Google" why the parent is gone. Sometimes they were shocked at what they found, sometimes they were reunited with their parent, and sometimes they came up empty. The findings of this research article suggest that mechanisms of parental incarceration operate differently from other forms of separation. The secrecy and deception experienced by those losing a parent may have negative emotional consequences later on in life.

## **Introduction**

There are over 3 million children with a parent currently incarcerated or recently released (Glaze and Marushak 2008), and there are millions more who have been separated from their parent due to incarceration in the United States (Murphey & Cooper 2015; Shared Sentence Project, 2016). Scholars have documented the intergenerational consequences of maternal and paternal incarceration (Murray and Farrington 2008; Murray, Farrington, and Sekol 2012; Geller et al. 2009; Parke and Stewart 2003; Miller 2006; Genty 2002; Wildeman 2014; Rodriguez, Smith, and Zatz 2009; Gabel and Johnston 1995; Turney 2014; Gabel 1992; Foster and Hagan 2009; Hairston 2007; Cho 2010; Shaw 2016). These effects are numerous and can further disadvantage troubled communities and increase child poverty (Clear 2009; DeFina and Hannon, 2010). Those who experience parental incarceration are at risk for many potentially negative outcomes such as: antisocial and behavioral problems (Wakefield and Wildeman 2011; Gabel 1992; Murray et al. 2012), residential instability (Geller et al. 2009; Tasca, Rodriguez, and Zatz 2011), homelessness (Wildeman 2014), and being lost in the foster care system (Johnson and Waldfogel 2002; Mumola 2000). However, the long-term effects of parental incarceration on youth are often not fully identified, as the population is not sufficiently monitored or tracked (Murray 2007).

Researchers have argued that parental incarceration can be a life-changing event that permanently damages the bonds between father and child (Woldoff and Washington 2008), and the financial strains associated with parental incarceration may influence the remaining parent to re-partner to offset this strain (Turney and Wildeman 2013). There are significant changes to family dynamics when a parent is incarcerated. For example,

children of incarcerated parents who are more attached to the parent before removal, those who have harsher or less stable care giving, and those who have negative visitation experiences are at higher risk of developing long lasting trauma due to this form of separation (Arditti, 2012). The significance of parental incarceration as an event, and its effects on long-term family interactions and child well-being, position parental incarceration as distinct from other forms of separation. Parental incarceration cannot be conflated with other family experiences.

The proportion of children experiencing parental incarceration has significantly increased in recent decades (Johnson and Waldfogel 2002; Western and Wildeman 2009), and this increase in the removal of parents has also been disproportionately experienced by minority youth (Western and Pettit 2010; Wildeman 2009). Conceptualizing parental incarceration as a form of separation, a key argument of this research paper is that there are unique long-term effects of parental incarceration that are important to tease out from other forms of parent and child separation. There is a need to identify how children of incarcerated parents navigate these unusual circumstances of separation. Secrecy to children in regards to parental incarceration in some cases can be beneficial (Hagen and Myers 2003), but what are the long-term effects on children who grow up experiencing this more secretive form of separation? Is stigma a key reason this form of separation is more secretive?

This research seeks to further explore unique elements of parental incarceration using 20 in-depth interviews with adults (18 or older) in California who experienced parental incarceration at some point in their life.

### **Literature Review**

The criminal justice system is an institution, unlike others, that operates to distribute “punishment” (Comfort 2007). It can therefore be argued that contact with this institution will produce distinct effects on families. This involuntary extraction to a total institution may produce secretive and deceptive forms of separation in cases of parental incarceration than in other forms of separation. The stigmatic label of “offender” placed on the individual extracted from society gives this form of separation a different nature. Many research studies have documented the stigma attached to once incarcerated individuals and potentially to their family members (Braithwaite, 1989; Petersilia, 2003; Pager, 2007; Braman, 2004; Foster and Hagan, 2007). It is important then to build on this research and expand on the mechanisms through which these elements affect the second generation. The punishment of the offender is in many cases also the punishment of those attached to the offender, as the majority of incarcerated individuals are parents (Travis, Mcbride, and Solomon, 2003; Glaze and Marushak, 2008).

A recent review compared some similarities and differences of parental incarceration to other forms of separation such as military deployment or migration (Rodriguez and Margolin 2015). There are many commonalities to parent absences for reasons of parental incarceration, military deployment or migration. These commonalities can be expressed through stressors and context factors, which can significantly affect whether the family responds positively or negatively to the absence of the parent (Rodriguez and Margolin 2015). There are also similar familial processes that assist families in dealing with the trauma of separation, such as openness of communication, warmth or discipline, contentions around the distribution of authority, and the redistribution of traditional family roles (Rodriguez and Margolin 2015). For example the

distribution of authority such as a parent trying to parent from the military, a parent trying to parent from prison, or a parent trying to parent from a different country may all similarly be incompatible roles of parenting which can have a wide array of effects on the child.

This research takes the stance that due to pre-incarceration, incarceration, and post-incarceration circumstances, parental incarceration is a unique form of parent-child separation and different than death, as death is a form of permanent physical separation which is not always the case for incarceration. It is also distinct from military deployment, as military deployment is mostly a voluntary entry into a total institution unlike parental incarceration. This institution is not designed to enact punishment on those entering it and can be interpreted as serving a societal good. There is also the opportunity/requirement for families to live on military bases, which is not apparent in parental incarceration. Parental incarceration is perhaps closest in relation to divorce. Research on divorce has argued that level of family conflict may be the key variable in the child's development of anti-social behavior and emotional adjustment (Demo and Acock 1988). When there are high levels of conflict in the marriage, divorce may actually improve the well-being of the children, and potentially serves a mechanism of relief (Amato, 2000). However, recent research has argued that for married couples, incarceration is significantly detrimental and increases the likelihood of divorce, and almost half of this association can be attributed to post-incarceration factors of less marital love, increased marital violence, and extra-marital sex (Siennick, Stewart, and Staff 2014). In this case it can be argued that the reduction of marital bonds and separation during incarceration, and the strains and violence post-incarceration, may be

more responsible for the dissolution of marriage than some of the pre-incarceration conditions. Incarceration is an incident that increases the likelihood of divorce and separation for married individuals (Lopoo and Western 2005). There are also a high number of incarcerated parents who were not married prior to the incarceration and simply experience separation, not divorce.

### ***Secrecy***

Of increasing concern is whether parental incarceration is qualitatively different than other forms of separation, such as that for death, divorce, or abandonment. It is also important to understand when parental incarceration is conflated with other forms of separation such as divorce, adoption, or entry into the foster care system. The above-mentioned literature only briefly mentions a key element of parental incarceration - secrecy. Secrecy may be a qualitatively unique aspect of parental incarceration not found in other forms of parental absence. As cited in the Rodriguez and Margolin's (2015) review, parental incarceration may be a more stigmatic event and thus the family may extract itself from social networks or support and may be secretive about the episode of parental incarceration in a protective manner (Hagen and Myers 2003; Nesmith and Ruhland 2008). Although the stigma may not be as direct and exclusionary, absence of a parent for military deployment may also be stigmatic if the child feels peers do not approve of this type of service (Mmari et al. 2009). Rodriguez and Margolin (2015) do elaborate that children with incarcerated parents may be provided little information or misleading information as to why the parent is absent (Bockneck et al. 2009; Poehlmann 2005); however, this secrecy is different in nature from secrecy of parental deployment. Most of the deceptive techniques used for children experiencing parental deployment were in regards to reducing the child's anxiety around the personal safety of the parent

(Chandra et al. 2010; Houston et al. 2009). This suggests that, as compared to parental incarceration in which children may not know their parent is institutionally confined, children with a parent deployed may be informed that their parent is in the military, they are just spared details of location and circumstances to reduce fear and trauma.

A key variable then is that of the child's knowledge of the separation due to the parent's location in a total institution, and why this is occurring. Additionally, even when the child is knowledgeable that the parent is incarcerated they may be less likely to understand why, as the remaining caregiver can act as a gatekeeper in a way that is deceiving to the child (Shlafer and Poehlmann, 2010). A child of a military parent may be lied to about the parent's actual location (i.e. warzone or training camp), but the child of an incarcerated parent may be lied to in regards to why the parent is actually gone, that is, the reason for absence (i.e. parent is working or at school, instead of incarcerated).

The lack of knowledge and understanding of the parent's removal is a key aspect of parental incarceration. Separation from a parent due to incarceration can have an effect on antisocial behaviors for young boys, but there are also important factors remaining such as the psychopathology of the remaining caregiver and the levels of understanding of the incarceration by other family members (Gabel, 1992). Hagen and Myers (2003) found that secrecy might actually be beneficial to young children if they do not have adequate social support. For these youth (N=116, age 6-13) openly talking about a mother's incarceration was associated with other behavioral problems. In a study of children in a mentoring program for children with incarcerated parents, researchers found that when children knew why their parent was incarcerated they were often told to keep it a secret, and in some cases children had to secretly pursue relationships with their

incarcerated parent without their caregiver knowing (Shlafer and Poehlmann, 2010). Many of the caregivers acted as “gatekeepers” and actively did things such as block incoming phone calls from the incarcerated parent to not “confuse” or “frustrate” the child. Alternatively, another element of secrecy in relation to parental incarceration is that of children defying the wills of gatekeepers and secretly contacting incarcerated parents. In one case a young girl even asked a mentor in the program if the mentor could send her father a valentine card she had made for him, and if they could do this without the caregiver knowing (Shlafer and Poehlmann, 2010).

Parental incarceration can also lead to the removal of the child from the home. One key example of this is a child’s placement into foster care. The elements of foster care placement that are important to note are the long-term episodes of familial separation and the lack of familial restoration that often occur when a child is placed in foster care (Roberts 2002). As Dorothy Roberts notes, the child welfare system increasingly serves the function of “freeing” children from families, and does little to ensure their long-term preservation (Roberts 2002). Entry into the child welfare system is especially pronounced in cases of maternal incarceration (Mumola 2000). In the early 1990s there was a significant increase in the number of children entering the foster care system due to parental incarceration (Johnson and Waldfogel 2002). As many agencies such as the criminal justice and foster care system may act in ways that separate families, how do children of incarcerated parents reconnect with separated parents? How long after the separation of parental incarceration does reconnection occur? Does parental incarceration lead to permanent separation?

Parental incarceration may be more secretive and deceptive to children than other forms of familial separation. However, the long-term effects of prolonged secrecy around parental incarceration have not been fully documented. AsHow do these elements of prolonged separation, secrecy, and deception affect children throughout their life-course? What methods do they use to combat these elements of secrecy and separation? If children of incarcerated parents are more likely to be withheld information due to the caregiver's acts of protectiveness, then how does this secrecy and deception affect them throughout their life? There are also gaps in understanding how long this secrecy and deception in relation to parental incarceration lasts. In these cases does the secrecy turn into a life-long episode of separation? How do children of incarcerated parents grow up and make sense of their deception?

### *Internet Use*

A last key piece of this puzzle is that the rise of the Internet and social media sites has drastically changed the way interactions occur within contemporary society. The majority of adolescents access the Internet through a mobile device at least once a day, and the majority of adolescents also have a social media site (Lenhart, 2015). Adolescents use the Internet for multiple purposes, and reports suggest that at least 73% of American teens age 13-17 possess a smartphone with Internet capabilities (Lenhart 2015). In a contemporary society, social media sites are often where adolescents express commitment and relationship statuses (Fox and Warber, 2013), it is where they document their life and exhibit a performance (Kramer and Winter 2008; Rosenberg and Egbert 2011), and it is where they often connect with family members. Internet use is an almost “constant” among teens with 92% reporting daily access (Lenhart 2015). With this

abundance of potential information just a click away, how does this relate to the secrecy revolving parental incarceration? It may have been easier to hide or limit information from children decades ago, and it may be much more difficult to keep information from an adolescent in today's society. How then are online interactions important to the study of parental incarceration? What emotions are experienced through online interactions between children of incarcerated parents and their removed parent? How often do they use online platforms to reduce secrecy from caregivers, and how successful are they in these attempts?

### **Theoretical Contribution**

This study addresses some of the previous gaps in the literature and seeks to answer remaining questions in regards to the secrecy revolving around parental incarceration. Some research has argued that secrecy around a mother's incarceration may actually be beneficial for young children (Hagen and Myers 2003). However, the long-term effects of secrecy and separation over time have not yet been uncovered. How do those who experience parental incarceration deal with secrecy and deception due to parental incarceration? How does it affect them emotionally? Also, what techniques do they use to combat the secretive nature of parental incarceration? How are contemporary platforms such as Google and Facebook used to reunite or reconnect families when family members or child welfare agencies fail to do so? As adolescents nowadays are much more technologically advanced, how do they use these tools to combat separation and secrecy, specifically in regards to parental incarceration? The literature currently does not fully address the experiences of separation that exist due to parental incarceration in contemporary society.

## **Methodology**

To expand the literature on the unique experiences of parental incarceration this research study utilizes 20 in depth interviews of adults who experienced parental incarceration as children. The benefits of interviewing those over the age 18 about their prior experiences include: 1) This allows a research focus on the long-term effects of parental incarceration on children; 2) This also provides an avenue for identifying any different effects present at different times in a child's life. For example, differences between parental incarceration at a young age, during adolescence, and into emerging adulthood.

To be an eligible participant in this study, individuals had to be at least 18 years of age and must have had their father or mother incarcerated prior to being an adult. Participants were recruited from central California through established contacts of the main researcher and snowball sampling. According to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's prison chronology, the first California prison was built in 1852, but since 1984 there have been 23 prisons built, with one being deactivated in 2003, resulting in a state total of 34 state prisons or medical facilities under CDCR supervision (CDCR.Ca.Gov 2017). The interviews for this study were conducted in a region that has a close proximity to many of these prisons. The lead researcher administered a semi-structured questionnaire that ranged from 40 minutes to just under 2 hours. Questions were focused on life experiences through youth and the effects of parental incarceration into emerging adulthood. Interviews were recorded, and then coded on similar themes. Pseudonyms were used throughout the process. The themes of the study and findings are discussed below.

## **Themes and Findings**

The primary findings of this study of parental incarceration can be expressed through the themes of secrecy and Googling parents. The themes were closely related, as findings reveal that online platforms such as Google and Facebook are utilized as mechanisms to combat the secrecy of parental incarceration and are used to reconnect and provide information not provided by other sources. The secrecy section focuses on the ways in which secrecy and deception can positively or negatively affect children, and also looks into the long-term emotional effects of secrecy and separation. The googling section focuses on ways children of incarcerated parents use contemporary technology to find information for themselves and either pursue or choose not to pursue family restoration.

### ***Secrecy***

The secrecy surrounding parental incarceration seems to be unique in and of itself. Of the 20 respondents experiencing parental incarceration, 45% (or nine respondents) recalled experiences of secrecy. These elements of secrecy were centered on: the parent's whereabouts, the reason the parent was incarcerated, and the deceptive techniques used to avoid informing the child. However, it was a reoccurring theme of this study that participants who wanted to often grew up and found information out for themselves.

There were three elements of secrecy reoccurring in the study: 1) Reason for incarceration: Whether the parent returned and was part of the child's life or not, many respondents were not aware of the circumstances of the parent's incarceration. Some may

argue this is a good thing, but it became problematic when children were given this information from other sources and not directly from a family member. These problematic experiences were often embodied in feeling stigmatized as part of an out-group, shock, and sadness. 2) The whereabouts of the parent: Even when the parent was first removed or later on in the child's life, children were often unaware of the whereabouts of the parent. Was the parent still in prison? Where was the parent living and how was the parent currently doing? 3) Being lied to: Many of the respondents were lied to about the circumstances and whereabouts of the parent, but did not realize they were being lied to until they became older and their understandings were more developed. For example, respondents recalled the experience of being told, "Dad has gone to go work" or "Dad is working." Yet, as they grew older they realized this was not the case. In some cases they witnessed as these lies were also told to their younger siblings and in this moment began to understand their own deception. This deception of children led them to have many questions. This next section analyzes these elements of secrecy surrounding parental incarceration.

The secrecy revolving Alex's mother's incarceration resulted in Alex never really knowing who his mother was. As will be seen in the next passage, when Alex grew up he was able to somewhat connect with his mother through an online platform, but for much of his youth he knew very little about her and had never even seen a picture of her. His mother was incarcerated when he was three years old and he lived with his father and grandparents. His father was also incarcerated for one year and during this time he was living with his grandparents. At first he was not told about his mother's incarcerations, but once his grandmother started to open up about his mother she did not tell Alex

anything positive about his mother. His only real knowledge of his mother came from his grandmother who referred to her as a “bad person.” This again speaks to the stigma around this form of separation as compared to others. The character of the parent and this form of separation are both described negatively. When Alex would ask his grandmother about his mother, she always responded negatively. For example, his grandmother would say “your mom is a bad person, don't talk to her, she's always in jail, she's into drugs.”

Interviewer: “Yeah and how would that make you feel?”

Alex: “Umm just I was young so I would just listen, I was like “Alright if that's what you say she's a bad person, alright.”... I already had my anger towards her so it was easier to just listen, my dad never really cared if I talked to my mom.”

Alex's mother was painted in a very negative light by his grandmother.. He was also told to stay away from her and to not attempt to contact her. This is similar to some of the elements of secrecy and gatekeeping noted in Turanovic and colleagues' study of caregivers (Turanovic, Rodriguez, and Pratt 2012), yet this passage is expressed from the viewpoint of the child. In this case the caregiver/gatekeeper's words amplified emotions Alex was already feeling due to his mother's incarceration. Interestingly Alex says this negativity was “easier to believe” due to the anger he felt toward his mother. This anger seems to come from elements of both separation and secrecy; that is, from his mother being gone, while simultaneously not really knowing why she is gone. Alex had never seen a picture of his mother or heard her voice and very little information was given to him about her.. Alex experienced another adverse family dynamic. In his mid-twenties, after finding his mother online, he was thinking of inviting his mother to his wedding. This would have been the first time, since being a child, that he would have seen his

mother, and it would have been the first time his kids ever met their grandmother. However, he was given an ultimatum by the grandmother, “Let me know if you do cause I won’t go.” Subsequently Alex did not invite his mother to his wedding as he felt loyalty to his grandmother who had helped raise him since a young age. This again shows, elements of parental incarceration and separation can last long after the original incident.

As noted, almost half of the participants experienced secrecy in regards to their parent’s incarceration. Belinda was another case in which the secrecy may have had long-term effects. Belinda’s father was incarcerated when she was a young child. She used to ask for her father but was never given clear answers. Over time she grew to not expect her father’s presence. Belinda recalls her mother telling her a story about her having somewhat of a nightmare about her father and asking her mother where her father was.

Belinda: “She's like, "Oh my gosh, mija, I remember when you were little. You were three or four years old and you woke up scared," and I was just listening to her. I was like, ‘Why?’ She was just like, ‘You woke up and you were super scared and you were like 'Where's Dad?’ The excuse was when I was little was, ‘Your dad's at work.’”

Belinda recalled an experience of asking for her father and receiving a deceptive answer. As an adult participating in this study she recognizes the answer she was given was not the truth, but at the time she was not in a position to question this information. As she states, the “excuse” when she was young was that he was at work. She understands now that this was not the case. I then asked Belinda if she ever looked into her father’s absence and incarceration when she grew up...

Belinda: "I just don't want to know. I'd be like, "It should be my business, but it's not."

Interviewer: "Yeah. So your mom, when did you guys first talk about it?"

Belinda: "We really haven't."

Interviewer: "No?"

Belinda: "No, it's weird. She's like, "I have all the paperwork if you want to see it," like all the case files and all that stuff. I'm like, "No, I'm good."

When Belinda agreed to be a participant in this study the conversation about her father's absence due to incarceration once again came up. Belinda's mother told her that she still had all of the files in regards to her father's incarceration, but Belinda did not want to see them. Belinda still does not know what led to her father's incarceration and why they were separated for so long. Interestingly the mother has kept the files in regards to the father's incarceration but for the majority of Belinda's life the information was kept secret from her. She was not offered this information until she was 21 years old, and now it has been so long that she couldn't come around to looking at them (in the last chapter she expressed a similar experience of anxiety when attempting to read his old letters).

Interviewer: "How long ago was that when she said that, like you could see the files and stuff?"

Belinda: "Even just legit, just recently...She's like, "They're there if you want to see them." I'm like, "No."

Interviewer: "She still has the files?"

Belinda: "Yeah. My mom keeps everything."

Interviewer: "Yeah, so she's never told you. Do you think that's a good thing or bad thing?"

Belinda: "I don't know. I think it was just to protect me from who my dad really is...She didn't want to bring me into that. She didn't want me to see that, or see my dad like that. You know?"

At a young age Belinda realized her dad had been incarcerated due to her uncles talking around her. They would tell her that her dad was in Pelican Bay Prison and would often do things with her, such as take her Easter egg hunting. Belinda's mother had never really discussed the incarceration with her daughter. She would sometimes show Belinda letters, letters Belinda still has, but there was still much confusion and secrecy around the situation. As seen above, Belinda associates the secrecy around her father's absences with protection. In this case she recognizes the caregiver/gatekeeper's tactics of deception as being protective in nature. She states that her mom did it to "protect her from who her dad really was." However, now when given the opportunity to obtain information and answers to the questions she once sought, Belinda refuses. She still doesn't read the letters, she still doesn't look at the files, and due to the emotional trauma expressed throughout the interview, it seems as the situation is still a sensitive topic of discussion for Belinda. She still doesn't want to know who her father "was" or "is." Roxy recalls a similar experience of secrecy around her experience of paternal incarceration. Roxy's father was incarcerated for receiving stolen property. At the time Roxy did not know this. She witnessed police taking him but was not sure of the circumstances. She would help her mother with her younger siblings and when questions arose about the father's whereabouts she and her younger siblings were given the answer, "He is at work." Eventually Roxy figured out that her father was not absent for so long simply due to work. She started to be aware of the collect phone calls and other signals that her father

was incarcerated. Just as her mother kept this a secret from her, Roxy kept this a secret from her younger brothers. Her younger brothers had many separation issues and negative experiences in school after her father's incarceration.

Interviewer: "Did you guys ever go like visit him?"

Roxy: "I didn't."

Interviewer: "You didn't, did your mom?"

Roxy: "No. My mom went to go visit him. I didn't, I talked to him on the phone and they were, they told me that he was working, but I mean I knew."

Interviewer: "So, they kind of tried hiding it from you?"

Roxy: "Yeah trying to hide from us, but I mean I knew. I knew where he was at."

Interviewer: "How did you know just because you seen it?"

Roxy: "Oh well because I saw it (laughs). How can the cops just take him and then he is working?"

Interviewer: "So, you remember-- so who would tell you that? Would it be like your mom that she would tell you or would you ever ask like hey where is dad?"

Roxy: "Yeah, she would say he is working. I think she said that, she knew that I knew but she just said that for the younger ones. So, they wouldn't get upset, and they believed it, they didn't see it, they believed it."

There are numerous elements of secrecy in the above passage. As Roxy witnessed the police taking her father it was harder to deceive her, "How can the cops take him and then he is working?" Roxy is conscious that the mother would mostly say this for the "younger ones" so they would not get upset. She then participated in the deception for her

younger siblings and did not question her mother. And in turn, they believed it. This experience was common among older siblings. They are often plagued with finding information out for themselves, and then acting in the best interests of their younger siblings by not revealing this information.

***Summary: Secrecy***

An apparent element of this theme is that children of incarcerated parents face episodes of deception as well as other emotional and financial difficulties that they may be facing. Some may argue this element of secrecy or deception is protective in nature, and some may argue this is harmful. Either way, I argue that the secrecy itself did have a long-term effect in many cases. Secrecy to children often resulted in children growing up full of questions and emotional difficulties in regards to the unexplained separation from their parent. For example, Alex recalled that he already had anger toward his mother because she was never there due to the early incarceration. Subsequently, when others would speak negatively of his mother it was easy for him to believe it because he knew so little about her and why she was gone. Secrecy overall resulted in many emotional difficulties that were not fully dealt with even into emerging adulthood. Many of the participants had an underlying need or desire to know where they came from or where their parent was. Some participants, due mostly to resentment, actively avoided obtaining information about their incarcerated parent.

***“Googling” Parents***

Another theme of this study is the use of online platforms as a mechanism to reduce the secrecy of parental incarceration. In many cases long lost family members would Google each other or add each other on social media sites such as Facebook. In

contemporary society the Internet is a common tool of interaction. Employers, those with romantic interests, and long lost friends often take to the Internet and Google the name of the person they seek. As parental incarceration has elements of secrecy and deception, children often grow up and search for answers to why their parent is gone for themselves. This process of “googling” their parent was significant for many respondents. Of the 20 participants 30% (or six respondents) reported that they had online experiences in relation to the secrecy of the parent’s absence. For some it was the first time they had seen their parent’s face, for some it was the first time they found out what their parent did and why they were truly gone, and for others the search ended up coming up short. This process of Internet interaction was important to document.

In cases of prolonged separation and continued secrecy, children grew up and learned mostly all of their information about the parent’s absence through Google searches. Berenice was such an example. Berenice’s father was incarcerated when she was young. She grew used to her father’s absence but she still was curious about why he was absent for so long. She revealed this process when I asked her the reason for her father’s incarceration

Interviewer: “And what was the reason your father was incarcerated?”

Berenice: “Uhh like I um, shoot. He uhh, he was like uhh... I don’t even know how to say it. Like... ummm I guess like a thief. I don’t really know. I guess he would steal stuff but. I didn’t even know. I had to do my own research, like why is he in jail for so many years. And I decided to google his name, and it was crazy the stuff I found out. Like I guess he was, like really. Like he was wanted. Like there was a warrant after him. Like they were out to get him. He was like, they even had a name for him. Because we lived in

this area. I forgot the name they had for him. He would rob people at gunpoint. And he, like, I mean sexually abused two girls. It was one girl, she was with her boyfriend. And he stole some of their things at gunpoint. And then made her, you know, do stuff. I found that all out online.”

Interviewer: “And so what made you want to google it when you did decided to google it?”

Berenice: “I was just curious you know. I feel like we had a right to know... I felt like everything was so hidden.”

Interviewer: “And uh, did you, why did you feel like googling it rather than asking your mom?”

Berenice: “I don’t think she even knew.”

Again, as seen above Berenice learned a great deal about her father’s crime online. Some participants chose to read these reports and others did not. Berenice was in high school at the time she first searched for her father online, and after describing the difficult details of her father’s crime she reminded me, “I found that all out online.” She is subtly suggesting this was a shocking moment she was not prepared for. She was curious and felt like she had a right to know what her father did, yet she was not prepared for the information she received. Although in this case it is probably advisable not to tell a child the details of these crimes, the problem comes in that in a contemporary, technologically advanced society, this information is only a click away. Berenice finding out for herself, with no adult supervision, was a significant event. Berenice was emotionally distraught when recalling this experience. She did not cry or yell, but instead

she spoke very slowly with a tone of sadness. I then asked Berenice if she relayed this information to her mother also.

Berenice: "Yea. Well I told my mom."

Interviewer: "You did tell her?"

Berenice: "Yea."

Interviewer: "After you Googled it?"

Berenice: "I can't really remember. She was flabbergasted. Like, I can't believe like. She was umm.... He just lied a lot."

Berenice reports that her mom experienced a similar feeling of shock when finding out about the father's crime. In many cases, parents actively kept information from children in somewhat of a protective manner. In this case Berenice's mother was unable to protect Berenice from information that she did not know herself. The secrecy of where her father was and why he was gone created feelings of curiosity in Berenice that many respondents expressed.

Other respondents recalled similar experiences of first seeing their parent through an online search. In many cases, they would both look at pictures of the parent and also gather information as to why the parent is gone. Ian and Eric were less than five years old when their father was incarcerated. Due to the length of his incarceration the sons had little to no contact with their father except for a letter here and there. Different elements of secrecy and deception were experienced throughout their childhood. They both recall finding pictures and information about their father's incarceration through Google.

Interviewer: "So how did you actually find out about the crime? Did you Google it or did you...?"

Ian: "Yeah our mom looked it up, um, our mom didn't want us really... ah she looked it up and then, our aunt looked it up... and told us how to look it up and then we, I, I, I did what she did."

Interviewer: "Where were you at, when you looked it up?"

Ian: "Um, actually I think I was at my grandma's... um, I think I brought like a computer or whatever and typed in his name and then found the report."

Interviewer: "Yeah, you just read it or what'd you think?"

Ian: "Ah, I mean obviously it's a sad thing... Ah, it's a sad thing to see, what um, what drugs do to you and obviously temptations... and it's sad to see anybody go through that."

I then asked his brother Eric if he also shared this online experience of finding out why his dad was gone for so long.

Interviewer: "And so did you Google it too, or?"

Eric: "Yeah, I, I looked into it, um, I just, I basically looked into it to where I just found a picture of him... Um and if anything, it wasn't really just like, um, I want to say just my mom told me the report. But now, we've never really seen him, uhm, I can't really remember, basically what he looks like. I mean, I can look up on Google what he looks like from his Facebook, that's about it."

Interviewer: "You have Facebook in jail?"

Eric: "His wife's Facebook"

Interviewer: "Is that the first picture you've seen of him in a while too?"

Eric: "Yeah, his face, his face would be drawn, I'll show you a picture of him."

*He then pulled out his laptop and showed me Google and Facebook images of his father*

*who was still in prison.*

Interestingly the two brothers had different responses to the provided information. Ian reviewed the report after his mother did. Ian explained all of the details of the crime to me and discussed his father's lengthy sentence. However, Eric chose to never read the report. He states that he let his mom tell him about the report and instead he just wanted to see a picture of his father for the first time. He then proceeded to show me a criminal sketch of his father and a picture of his father on Facebook. They joked saying they do not look much like him.

Many of the participants who used online platforms for reconnection, did so because of the secrecy around parental incarceration. For example Alex's first interactions with his mother were online. In this case his mother googled him and added him on Facebook. Besides some letters when he was younger, this social media site experience was the first time he was able to interact with his mother; as for most of his life he was discouraged from doing so.

Interviewer: "So when she added you, so you right away knew it was her?"

Alex: "Yeah."

Interviewer: "From her name and stuff, and umm did you go look at her pictures and stuff?"

Alex: "Yeah I went through all her pictures haha. Like a stalker haha."

Interviewer: "Yeah and how was that? How did you feel when you were looking through her pictures and different things?"

Alex: “Umm, just I would say some of the anger came back, because I seen that she was like happy cause she had her Facebook for a few years, and I was like, well I'm over here struggling, and you're over here all happy.”

Interviewer: “Yeah, and so your kids have never met your mom either?”

Alex: “No.”

Interviewer: “Did she ask about that when you guys like talked or anything?”

Alex: “Yeah she was always saying, “Oh I want to meet your kids, your kids are so beautiful,” I always tell her the same thing, “If you want to meet them, get your life together.”

Interviewer: “Yeah, do you think she’s still on drugs and stuff?”

Alex: “I would assume so, she just got out of jail, probably a year ago.”

Interviewer: “Yeah, and how did you find out she just got out again?”

Alex: “She posted a status that she ‘got out’ haha”

The above passage is an example of the relationship between parental incarceration and online interactions. Alex saw pictures of his mother for the first time, and also was able to gain insight into her life. He recalled feelings of anger toward her when he was younger, and said these feelings came back up as he went through her pictures. These feelings of anger may be associated with a sense of abandonment as he recalled that she “looked happy” while he was “struggling.” He was also able to see that she had recently been incarcerated again as he read one of her posts that said, “Just got out.” To this date, mostly all of Alex’s interactions with his mother have occurred online. This is when she first began to be a part of his life again. As noted in the secrecy

findings, Alex was even going to ask his mother to attend his wedding through Facebook, but did not because the grandmother did not want her to go. After the separation of parental incarceration, Alex, like other respondents, gained most of his knowledge of his mother online. This, combined with the little he had been told about his mother prior to that time, led him to tell his mother that he wanted her to “Get her life together.” The somewhat shallow interactions online (as compared to continuous human presence), combined with the secrecy and lack of information provided during childhood, made it easier to perceive a parent negatively.

Another respondent expressed how prevalent these online interactions between separated family members were in her disadvantaged neighborhood. Belinda recalled not feeling shame about her father’s record due to the fact many of her friends had similar experiences. This may suggest that feelings of stigma are reduced among like others. One of her close friends, who also had a parent incarcerated, recalled a time when her father attempted to add her on Facebook and her response when seeing him.

Belinda: “It’s like we understand each other on that level and respect each other, and so we don’t really ask about it. Sometimes it’ll come up every once in a while, like, “Oh, my dad just followed me on Facebook.” Actually, that one was just recent. My friends, they’re sisters and I hang out with them because we’re all around the same age. They were like, “Oh my gosh. My dad just followed me on Facebook.” They’re like, “You want to see him?” I was like, “Okay. Go ahead and show me.” I was like, “Are you accepting it,” and they’re like, “No,” because--they grew up, they’re like 25 and the other one’s 22, and their dad is barely trying to come in.”

Not only did many children use Google and social media to locate their parents, many released parents also used these platforms in attempts to rekindle relationships with their children. In the case above Belinda recalled experiences of her friends who also experienced parental incarceration. Although Belinda's friends looked at their father's pictures and such, they chose not to accept his friend request. This online "acceptance" of their father seemed to signal a significant event of him somewhat coming back in their lives, and in this case the separation had been so long that they decided not to accept him back in their lives. As Belinda states, her friends were in their mid twenties and this Facebook request symbolized him "barely trying to come in" their lives.

Finally, some searches came up short. When Aaron was born his mother had drugs in her system and she was incarcerated. In somewhat of a form of relief, the state acting on the best interests of the child, Aaron was placed in foster care and quickly adopted. However, the curiosity and desire to know his mother and his family stayed with Aaron into adulthood. He has never seen a picture of his mother. He first attempted to use social agencies and then Google to locate his mother. In this case he still does not know much.

Interviewer: "So once you became old enough is first when you started looking, so the whole time you had no contact with your biological Mom?"

Aaron: "No, never met them, no contact at all. I don't know where they're at, but the last time I talked to my adoptive Mom, she said my Mom was last at Las Vegas Jail, or something like that. And my Dad, she said, he could maybe be here in Merced, but I know I have siblings, too, but you never know."

Interviewer: “And when you started searching, how did you ... What was your searching process?”

Aaron: “So I went through, 'Cause I remember, when it's close to Christmas the adoption thing in Merced, off of 140, used to have this little Santa thing. And my Mom would always say our social workers were there. But I haven't had a social worker for a long time 'cause I was adopted, so I don't really need one, 'cause I wasn't in foster care for that long. I just went there, to that spot, and then I asked for my ... Where my parents are at, and all that stuff, and they just told me, "Oh, here's a meeting, just come on this day." And I never showed up on that day, so, like, I didn't really try to find them, but I kind of did.”

Interviewer: “Kind of did, yeah. And is that something they do, they, like, reunite families, or something like that?”

Aaron: “They said they could only give me a certain amount of information, and I didn't know what the information was.”

Interviewer: “Yeah. And did you ever, like, Google your mom?”

Aaron: “I tried Google, but there's a lot of her name.”

Interviewer: “People with the same name?”

Aaron: “Yeah, so it's kind of hard. And then my Dad, I don't know his name at all.”

Aaron had the experience of searching for his mother and coming up empty-handed. This is often the case with online searches. A search of one name may bring forth a plethora of information. This is extremely difficult when youth of incarcerated parents have experiences shrouded in secrecy. They may not even know the state their parent resides in and in many cases will not be able to distinguish their faces from other faces. I then asked Aaron how it was to have never seen a picture of his mother and how does it feel to not know who she is...

Aaron: "Yeah, it just sucks, I wish ... I still had a social worker when I was adopted. She'd say, 'Oh, your Mom's here.'"

Interviewer: "Yeah, to be that bridge, almost, kinda to connect."

Aaron: "Yeah, like, trying to ... Background with my real family, to see what they're doing. 'Cause I wanna see who they are. What if I played them in sports, or something? ... Yeah, like, legit. 'Cause ... I always thought this girl was my sister in high school. Her name was, like, Rose. She was a light-skinned girl, she was adopted when she was young, and she was, like, a year younger than me. I was all, "Dude! You might be my sister." And she's all, "Brother!" We just played around like that. But, it just sucks, not knowing anything any of my real family."

Interviewer: "Still to this day, do you still have questions about it and stuff?"

Aaron: "I always have questions. All the time. I just don't have the time to look for them right now, because of school and work. I barely have time to go back home...I have so much going on right now. But I still wanna know who they are."

As Aaron recalls, the secrecy and subsequent curiosity in regards to his mother's incarceration is still present into his early twenties. He continually wants to know who they are, and due to the little information that he has (for example, he does not know what city or state his mother resides in) his online search for his mother was short-lived. In this case he wishes some element of social work or a social agency had kept him in contact with his mother, even if she was not "fit" to parent him.

***Summary: Googling Parents***

Overall, online platforms served an informational and connective function for children of incarcerated parents. Sometimes due to secrecy children were lied to about their parents whereabouts and other information. In these cases, children of incarcerated parents sometimes used online platforms to uncover answers for themselves. For example, numerous participants wanted to make light of why the parent was gone for *so long*. Berenice was one of these cases. None of the answers she had been given made much sense to her. Through her own investigation, using Google, Berenice found out that her father had committed some serious violent crimes and was serving a lengthy prison sentence. She recalled reading the details of his case and providing these details to her mother. She was very emotional while speaking about this. Ian and Eric similarly identified their father was serving 25 to life due to Google and were able to read the details of his crime. This was also the first time they saw a picture of their father. In other cases, the parent was already released from jail or prison and Google or Facebook was the way the family reconnected. Alex first saw a picture of his mother on Facebook and was able to have his first conversations with her through this online platform. In sum, it was evident that due to the current technological climate and today's children's consistent

access to social media and a plethora of publically available information, such as arrest records, there are many new ways in which children are attempting to find out answers for themselves.

### **Discussion and Conclusion:**

The secrecy of parental incarceration to children, mostly operationalized by deception, avoidance of the subject, and separation through foster care or adoption, may cause long lasting emotional trauma into adulthood. This secrecy breeds curiosity that is often mediated by technologically savvy teens. In many of these cases children grow up and Google a parent's name to find out the answers about the separation for themselves. However, being provided this information from a third party, particularly a non-family member, was an adverse experience for children with incarcerated parents.

This research article has argued that parental incarceration is qualitatively unique from other forms of separation. The distinct mechanisms of parental incarceration discussed in this paper are secrecy and combatting secrecy using online platforms such as Google. These experiences are argued to be more concentrated and apparent in parental incarceration than other forms of separation such as divorce, military deployment, or death. Parental incarceration is argued to be more stigmatic than the above forms of separation, and has the unique element of criminal justice intervention and involuntary removal to a total institution. As research has argued that secrecy in terms of maternal incarceration may be beneficial for young children (Hagen and Myers 2003), this research article contributes to the current literature on parental incarceration by revealing the long term effects of secrecy and mechanisms in which children grow up and make sense of this distinct form of parent to child separation. Gatekeepers often acted

deceptively to children in a protective manner. This research study utilized the perspectives of the children, now adults, to identify how this affects children of incarcerated parents and the ways in which they navigate this unique form of separation.

In many cases, when the child was not present to witness the arrest of the parent, the child experienced elements of secrecy and deception that often lasted into adulthood. This secrecy at a young age led many children to grow up and seek answers for themselves. As these interviews were conducted between 2016 and 2017, respondents recalled using contemporary technology to gather information. This resulted in children “googling” their parent’s name to find out where they were and why they were gone. This Google search also led to other online interactions such as Facebook and other social media.

Parental incarceration is argued to be a unique experience of separation from children. The emotional difficulties, due to the secrecy around events and their deception, lasted for many years. Besides elements of financial strain and residential instability, the difficulties of separation for this population should be acknowledged and increasing social support and services should be directed toward children with incarcerated parents.

The small sample size of participants in this chapter limits inferential power and future studies should seek to further uncover the mechanisms in which parental incarceration creates unique experiences for children losing a parent to the criminal justice system. The effects of parental incarceration are vast and multidimensional. Future studies should also compare cases in which parental incarceration is not shrouded in secrecy and analyze the long-term effects this can have on parent to child separation. In all, this research study argues that work should be made to reduce the stigma around

incarceration and parental incarceration and to not only reintegrate offenders, but also to reconnect and restore family units when possible.

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Conclusion

Recent research has argued that children of incarcerated parents fare less well in the education system than their counterparts. They may be less ready for school (Haskins, 2014), they may be more likely to be held back or drop out (Turney and Haskins, 2014; Cho, 2011), they may have lower school performance (Foster and Hagan, 2007), and due to one or more of these obstacles they ultimately have lower levels of educational attainment into emerging adulthood than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration. There is also a clear disproportionality in experiencing parental incarceration by race, with Black, and then Latino, children being significantly more likely to lose a parent to the criminal justice system than their White counterparts (Western and Pettit, 2010). The intergenerational mechanisms that produce this demobilizing effect of lower educational attainment must be uncovered; this dissertation took a step in this direction.

The argument of this dissertation is that the intergenerational effects of parental incarceration can mostly be conceptualized with stigma, strain, and demobilization. As the incarceration rate rose so did the stigma around incarcerated individuals (Petersillia, 2003). Many once incarcerated individuals will have difficulty obtaining housing and employment, and will be excluded from many traditional aspects of society due to their criminal record. It is important then to understand the ways in which this can affect the second generation. A key contribution of this research study is a better understanding of the *transference of stigma*. For example, a first generation college student who works her way up and obtains a master's degree in criminal justice can be excluded from criminal justice oriented jobs due to the incarceration or criminal record of her parent. Background

checks of family members make it increasingly difficult for minorities to gain employment. This transference of stigma also occurred when children of incarcerated parents were associated with their parent's crime or criminal lifestyle and thus stigmatized against.

Residential instability and financial strain were also key elements of demobilization. The qualitative data revealed that many children who experienced parental incarceration went through severe financial hardships and often had unsure living circumstances. This would result in changing schools, moving apartments, living in garages, and other unstable living arrangements, as well as having to work at a young age to offset the financial strain as the result of the extraction of parental resources. The quantitative data revealed similar findings. Using multigenerational data, this dissertation also argues that children of once incarcerated parents move more often than their counterparts, have high levels of school absenteeism, and lower levels of school attachment, as measured by club and extracurricular membership, than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration. Although this population did not hold lower levels of educational aspirations or views toward the importance of education than their counterparts not experiencing parental incarceration, they do not share the same educational success.

The elements of this research study combine to argue that the racialized experience of mass incarceration in the United States can also create and sustain intergenerational inequality through the demobilization of minority youth. A push should be made toward less stigmatic and punitive forms of corrections and toward more restorative and reintegrative forms of corrections. Much of what incarceration does can

be accomplished in the community in a form that is more financially effective and provides lower recidivism rates. The long-term punishment of parents and their children is argued to be detrimental to overall equality and mobility. Mass incarceration has become a normalized process in post civil rights United States. There are significant reductions in resources to homes and communities, and there are elements of stigma, strain, and other difficulties that children from these families face. Acknowledging this intergenerational impact is necessary to generate practices that are more beneficial to social equality.

#### Limitations and future research:

There are numerous limitations to the research studies presented in this piece. This dissertation uses mixed methods and both the qualitative and quantitative data sets come with their own unique limitations. First, the Howard B. Kaplan multigenerational data set was accumulated in Houston, Texas, which brings into question the generalizability of the statistical findings of the first chapter. However, as chapter one argues, this location is comparable to many of the large cities hit hardest with mass incarceration. Another limitation of the research study is that I did not distinguish the age at which the child experienced parental incarceration, and also the data set cannot distinguish the duration of the parent's incarceration or how serious the parent's offense was. This research study only looked at whether the adolescent had a parent was incarcerated at some point in their life or not. Although this does strengthen the stigma argument of the duration of the punishment of labels, it would be beneficial to have this information on the parent's offense and child's subsequent experiences throughout life-course stages. Finally, this study uses both maternal and paternal incarceration under the

umbrella of parental incarceration. Studies benefit from looking at the effects of maternal incarceration and paternal incarceration separately, however, this study again is focused on the effects of labels and stigmatization.

The qualitative data utilized in chapters two and three have limitations also. All of the interviews were conducted in Central California, which limits the scope of experiences documented. However, chapter 2 argues that this region is a prime location for studying the effects of mass incarceration due to its high concentration of incarcerations in this region. Also, the small sample size of this study limits the generalizability of the findings. The qualitative data set is derived from the interviews of 20 respondents over the age of 18 and the last chapter focuses on the experiences of just nine of these individuals. This low sample size does not give the study ample room for inference, but instead assists us in further understanding the mechanisms by which intergenerational demobilization through parental incarceration can occur. To increase the generalizability of this study it would be best to increase the sample size of in-depth interviews. There is also the issue of subjectivity. The subjective biases of the lead researcher, myself, can influence the development of themes and conclusions of the research. Although this limitation is present, elements of intersubjectivity were incorporated to reduce this effect. The two undergraduate researchers who assisted in transcribing the data also assisted in extracting quotes for themes. This increases the likelihood that not only the lead researcher identified elements of stigma and strain in the coded passages.

Future research should focus on reducing and further documenting what this dissertation calls demobilization. The experiences of children with incarcerated or

formerly incarcerated parents have long been conflated with other forms of disadvantage, such as urban poverty. Identifying the effects of this at risk population is of continuing concern. Longitudinal data sets are most fit for this line of research, as it is important to identify the effects of parental incarceration over time. Qualitative data should also be collected over time to assist researchers in identifying the possible mechanisms of the disadvantage this population is experiencing. This study links the first generation to the second generation: future studies can analyze how intergenerational this effect really is by examining a third generation, or identifying the criminal history of the first generation respondent's parents. How long do the intergenerational effects of mass incarceration linger?

Research should also further explore the positive aspects of parental incarceration such as relief. How does incarceration affect children when the removal was necessary and beneficial, for instance when a parent is violent toward family members? How do they interpret this form of separation through relief? There is also a lack of research on the current success rates of programs for children with incarcerated parents. What types of interventions are most successful in reducing stigma and strain on the second generation? There is much room for future research as parental incarceration touches many areas. Key areas of focus might include the relationship between parental incarceration and foster care, the relationship between parental incarceration and employment, and further identifying the effects of parental incarceration on long-term educational mobility.

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