

THE NAVIGATION OF MOTHERHOOD FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN, WEST  
INDIAN, AND HISPANIC WOMEN IN REENTRY

By

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## ABSTRACT

### The Navigation of Motherhood for African American, West Indian, and Hispanic Women in Reentry

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Though women are less likely than men to be incarcerated and are disproportionately outnumbered in United States jails and prisons (Guerino et al., 2011; Minton, 2013), women in state facilities are more likely to report being parents (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Mumola, 2000) and most plan to rekindle maternal relationships with their children upon their release (Barnes & Stringer, 2014; Hairston, 1991). Research demonstrates that women face substantial burdens during their reentry into the community, but reentry burdens may be more challenging to women of color who stand at the intersection of sexism and racism (Brown, 2010; Roberts, 1993). Ethnic differences among Black women are overlooked, however, as existing knowledge of women's experiences is often constructed along a Black/White dichotomy. Furthermore, self-conceptions as mothers, social expectations of mothers, and attempts to mother may place *additional* burdens on formerly incarcerated women with children. Yet, motherhood is still understood as a motivating factor in women's lives post-incarceration (Brown & Bloom, 2009; Hayes, 2009).

This study investigates how formerly incarcerated women navigate motherhood and how this process influences mothers' reintegration after their release from imprisonment. The research draws on 37 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with formerly incarcerated mothers. These women's narratives focus on the role that maternal

desires, decisions and behaviors play across various aspects of life post-incarceration: parenting, employment and finances, living arrangements, custody of children, as well as recovery from histories of addiction. This study utilized a comparative sampling strategy to unpack the experiences of groups viewed collectively as “minorities” and to examine similarities and differences among African American, West Indian and Hispanic formerly incarcerated mothers. There is also a comparative feature across varying degrees of contact with children (both minor and adult children) – specifically, mothers living with their children, mothers not living with their children but remaining in contact, and mothers without contact.

This study not only examines post-incarceration reintegration for formerly incarcerated mothers but it captures the intersectionality of criminal status, gender, and race/ethnicity. Furthermore, its comparative features go beyond common racial-ethnic labels and classifications of mother-child relationships in understanding the role of navigating motherhood in women’s reintegration after incarceration.

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Isaiah, mommy did it!

## DEDICATION

To all the guardian angels that guided me during my time at Rutgers University:

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*Ms. Aisha Karriem*

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My work is dedicated in your names as the constant motivation  
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“We may encounter many defeats but we must not be defeated.” – Maya Angelou



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Research on parental incarceration often emphasizes the effects of incarceration on children (Siegel, 2011; Turney & Wildeman, 2015; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013; Wildeman & Turney, 2014). This research, albeit finding mixed effects (National Research Council, 2014, pp. 262-263), examines potential effects of maternal incarceration on children's perceived academic performance and preparedness (Cho, 2009; Dallaire et al., 2010; Hagan & Foster, 2012), residential instability (Geller et al., 2009; Hissel 2014), and behavioral problems (Hissel, 2014; Wildeman & Turney, 2014) – to name a few. While valuable, the extensive research on children may be guided by notions of the children as “innocent bystanders” of their parents' decisions and, thus, worthy of such attention. Yet, this research does not problematize or explore the effects of maternal incarceration on the mothers themselves.

I diverge from this common research focus on children with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parents and, instead, I examine mothers' narratives of motherhood post-incarceration and the role of mothering in their reintegration back into society after their release. I do this with special attention to various aspects of life post-incarceration, including childrearing practices, employment and finances, recovery from addiction, custody of children, and living arrangements. Why? Reports clearly establish the high likelihood that women offenders are mothers (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Mumola, 2000) as well as the vast presence of substance use among women offenders (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999; Snell & Morton, 1994) – and yet, there is still limited discussion regarding the overlap of these two elements in mothers' experiences upon release from

incarceration. Furthermore, it is widely accepted within existing literature that gender plays a significant role in the organization of the labor market, and in individuals' experiences within the workplace. Such experiences, however, are complicated by structural inequalities and common assumptions about the performance and work ethic of formerly incarcerated individuals. Research also highlights that although mothers often live with minor children and serve as primary caregivers prior to incarceration (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Mumola, 2000), not all have custody and some do not have custody of all of their under-aged children (see: Siegel, 2011). While these arrangements may persist or shift after incarceration, custodial arrangements are not definitive markers of mother-child relationships for formerly incarcerated women. It may be valuable to not only examine post-incarceration motherhood for women with custody of their minor children, but to also explore the navigation of motherhood among mothers with varying custodial arrangements and degrees of contact with their children. Overall, it is worth understanding the interplay of these aspects in women's lives post-incarceration given that the navigation of motherhood may shape women's reintegration back into their communities.

### **Research Approach**

Existing criminological literature often quantifies the experiences of formerly incarcerated women and mothers, which may reinforce notions of "unfit" or "bad" mothers when presented without a clear understanding of the full narrative. I, however, gather the women's narratives through qualitative interviews to collect data that is often overlooked in less-interactive approaches. It is no secret that mothers' experiences are often dismissed or – if considered – presented in a way that undermines their accounts by

further encouraging discussions of “unfit” or “bad” mothers according to socially constructed standards [for a review, see Garcia (2016b); Schram, 1999; Sharpe (2015)]. In gathering their narratives, I explore how they, themselves, understand the post-incarceration navigation of motherhood and how this process influences their reintegration back into society amidst the collateral consequences of incarceration. This approach is favorable to obtain an accurate account of their maternal desires, decisions, and behaviors within various aspects of life after their release.

Within this study, I also explore how women’s navigation of motherhood across varying racial-ethnic groups impacts their reintegration. Criminological research demonstrates that formerly incarcerated mothers may enact motherhood as a resource for reentry and reintegration post-incarceration (see Brown & Bloom, 2009; Hayes, 2009). Yet, African American, West Indian, and Hispanic women are typically considered together as “minorities,” with little attention to how social and cultural differences might impact motherhood and its place in the reentry process. In fact, socio-structural and cultural variations in women’s experiences and meanings of motherhood may profoundly shape the navigation of motherhood after imprisonment. Thus, I purposefully recruit formerly incarcerated women of African American, West Indian, and Hispanic background as a more appropriate method to capture the realities of racial-ethnic experiences within the nuances of reintegration.

In addition to this, I also consider varying degrees of contact that formerly incarcerated mothers have with their children. Formal and social agencies may impose normative constructions of motherhood onto women and penalize women when they challenge these norms (Arendell, 2000; Flavin, 2001; Roberts, 1993). Yet, mothers in the

criminal justice system may hold unique meanings and values about motherhood that are shaped by their personal experiences. In order to best capture the nuances of post-incarceration motherhood, I do not limit my recruitment to mothers with normative classifications like having custody of their children, which is not an accurate representation of mother-child relationships or interaction (see Siegel, 2011). Instead, I include formerly incarcerated mothers with varying degrees of contact with their children since differing mother-child interactions may shape the navigation of motherhood in unique ways. Thus, I comparatively examine how women navigate motherhood when they live with their children, when they do not live with their children but remain in contact, and when they do not have contact with their children.

### **Overview of Chapters**

Given that identities, meanings, and behaviors are all interconnected, according to identity theory (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Stets & Burke, 2003; Stryker & Burke, 2000), Chapter Two reviews the concepts of identity theory and the link between identities and associated behaviors. Within Chapter Two, I also present knowledge on the navigation of motherhood during incarceration, with special attention to the salience of maternal identities and inmate identities. In doing so, I review the implications of women's internalized meanings of motherhood for life after incarceration. Then, I discuss the additional penalization of "other" mothers according to normative constructions of maternal contact with children but also based on notions of mothering as a racialized construct embedded in White, middle-class standards (Hays, 1996; McMahon, 1995; Roberts, 1993).

My study asks two questions. First, how and to what extent do women's identities



as mothers impact their desires, decisions and behaviors after their release from imprisonment? Second, how does the post-incarceration navigation of motherhood for African American, West Indian, and Hispanic women influence various aspects of their reintegration after imprisonment, and what role does racial-ethnic background play in this process? In order to answer these questions, I gathered qualitative data. Chapter Three reviews my research design, including a detailed explanation of my purposive and theoretical sampling strategies and my interview procedures. In Chapter Three, I also provide a thorough profile of study participants and describe the steps taken in my grounded theory approach to data analysis, with discussions of potential limitations and intellectual merits of my study.

Given that women's parenting styles and practices may shape their maternal experiences post-incarceration, knowledge of their childrearing patterns will foster our understanding of women's navigation of post-incarceration motherhood and its potential influences on their reintegration. In Chapter Four, I contribute to this knowledge by presenting an analysis of my discussions with formerly incarcerated mothers about their ideals of motherhood, their maternal experiences upon release from incarceration, and their perceptions of variations in mothering. I present the mothers' narratives of their perceived differences from women who are not mothers as well as their perceptions of how they differ from the periods before they entered motherhood themselves. I discuss the elements formerly incarcerated mothers believed rendered women "good" mothers, and I compare such discussions among mothers with varying degrees of contact with their children. The factors that eased and impaired mothers' ability to enact maternal ideals post-incarceration are also examined, which includes the transition to post-

incarceration mothering, mothering through troubled relationships with children, and mothering the next generation. I, then, highlight some restrictions the women faced in performing maternal behaviors upon their release and while under parole supervision. Finally, I integrate an analysis of racial and ethnic background in the women's post-incarceration mothering experiences and in their perceptions of their differences with other racial and ethnic groups.

In Chapter Five, I discuss the nature of women's experiences in the labor market and the workplace, and how they fit with what we know about gender, race/ethnicity, a criminal record, and motherhood when entering the workforce and maneuvering in the workplace. I also examine the various roles that motherhood plays in how women think about and make sense of work and their maternal desires. Specifically, I explore post-incarceration mothering through financial constraints, the salience of women's maternal identities through unemployment and financial barriers, and the impact of a salient maternal identity when seeking and sustaining work post-incarceration.

Chapter Six examines formerly incarcerated mothers' desires and attempts to recover from addiction. I begin with the women's narratives about the impact of addiction on their lives as mothers. Then, I explore the factors that motivated the mothers' recovery efforts. This is followed by a discussion of how the mothers navigated motherhood while in recovery and how they managed recovery through maternal obstacles. This chapter also includes a discussion of social responsibility in the mothers' experiences with recovery. This not only examines the role of positive social support networks in recovery efforts, which has been studied extensively, but also explores the negative impact of the social constructions of motherhood, of others in reentry or drug

treatment programs, and of cultural values that alienate women with addiction histories of particular racial-ethnic backgrounds.

In Chapter Seven, I elaborate on the mothers' post-incarceration experiences with custodial prerequisites and the meaning of motherhood within noncustodial arrangements. Mothers were tasked with demonstrating their own maternal fitness according to preconceived notions defined by others of what it means to be suitable mothers. In order to gain custody of their children, the mothers were required to meet a number of prerequisites such as getting certifications from parenting programs, consistently having clean urine samples (to demonstrate sobriety) and obtaining suitable housing for them and their children, which ultimately required a form of income. While these mandates have been put in place to ensure mothers' preparation and fitness before gaining custody of their children, mothers described these prerequisites as added weight placed upon the already heavy burdens of reentry. This chapter explores the women's narratives about navigating motherhood and reintegrating post-incarceration within this overlap between the criminal justice system and child protective services (Phillips & Dettlaff, 2009; Phillips et al., 2010).

Chapter Eight includes a brief review of the major study findings regarding the navigation of post-incarceration motherhood and its role in women's reintegration. I provide my conclusions with careful attention to comparisons across racial-ethnic background and degrees of contact with children. Here, I also discuss the implications of my findings for reentry and treatment programs, program personnel, and policymakers. I also make suggestions for future research studying women's reintegration.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK

Criminological research demonstrates that motherhood is often considered a vital incentive to desist from crime and reintegrate into society after release from incarceration (Brown & Bloom, 2009; Covington, 2003; Hayes, 2009; Kreager et al., 2010; Leverentz, 2014; Michalsen, 2011; Sharpe, 2015). Yet, research also reveals that motherhood may be a source of strain for women in the criminal justice system (Aiello & McQueeney, 2016; Michalsen, 2011), potentially complicating women's experience upon their release. Thus, it is imperative to understand the meanings and values of a maternal identity for formerly incarcerated women and to investigate their behavioral navigation of motherhood in order to more accurately assist them in their reentry.

Social constructions of mothers' roles center around principles of intensive mothering that is "child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive" (Hays, 1996, p. 8; see also McMahon, 1995). This expectation of mothering, however, is impractical for mothers involved in the criminal justice system and deprived of socioeconomic opportunities. For instance, formerly incarcerated mothers are often burdened with substantial obstacles in gaining employment, obtaining suitable housing, securing custody of their children and overcoming histories of addiction – matters that may overlap and complicate the mothering experience. While societal expectations of motherhood may be impractical for mothers whom experienced incarceration, identity theory accounts for women's internalized meanings and expectations of their maternal identity. In addition, identity theory allows for an

investigation of how a maternal identity shapes maternal behaviors within particular contexts like the criminal justice system – particularly after imprisonment.

### **Identity Theory**

Identities are cognitive schemas that organize beliefs, meanings, and applied patterns relevant to the self and that subsequently shape how situations are defined. There is interplay between identity and roles seeing as one's identity may be deemed as “internalized role expectations” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 286; see also Stets & Burke, 2003). Yet, it is important to distinguish between the concepts of roles and identities: “Role is external; it is linked to social positions within the social structure. Identity is internal, consisting of internalized meanings and expectations associated with a role” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 289). Thus, in the eyes of women who *self-identify* as mothers, their maternal identities may go beyond the mere socialization to maternal *roles* that are constructed by society but may, instead, be associated with unique meanings they have developed.

There are two important concepts of identity: identity salience (Stryker, 1968) and identity prominence (McCall & Simmons, 1966). Individuals may have multiple co-existing identities such as mother, wife, thief, criminal, and inmate. Sheldon Stryker argues that, in the presence of multiple identities, there is a hierarchy of identity salience: “The concept of identity salience may be defined as the probability, for a given person, of a given identity being invoked in a variety of situations” (Stryker, 1968, p. 560). Nuttbrock and Freudiger (1991) found that a maternal identity was, in fact, a salient identity that arose in various situations. In their study, they found that the salient maternal identity was associated with mothers' personal sacrifice as measured by “the tendency to

sacrifice time and energy in a role” and was also associated with mothers’ burden acceptance as measured by “the tendency to accept the responsibilities of the role without assistance from others” (Nuttbrock & Freudiger, 1991, p. 148).

McCall and Simmons (1966) argue that identity prominence refers to the values and ideal features associated with a particular identity and a larger “true self.” As explained by Nuttbrock and Freudiger (1991, p. 147), “The prominence of an identity reflects the extent to which the image of self associated with it (i.e., role identity) corresponds to the individual’s broader ideals (i.e., the ideal self); the degree of identity prominence is revealed by emotional responses to evaluation in conjunction with role performances.” For instance, threats on their behavioral enactment of values and features associated with the ideal self, however, may cause mothers to have negative emotional responses to this conflict. Put simply, the ability to meet maternal ideals may influence feelings of joy and pride while the dissonance between maternal ideals and what the women are able to do may cause sadness.

As noted by Stets and Burke (2003, p. 135), the prominence hierarchy “addresses what an individual *values* [while] the salience hierarchy focuses on how an individual will likely *behave* in a situation” and in the face of various social circumstances. According to McCall and Simmons (1966, p. 85), the prominence hierarchy of identity can be understood as the “ideal self” while the salience hierarchy of identity can be understood as the “situational self.” Thus, the two concepts of identity prominence and identity saliences are different and should not be used interchangeably, but they have a statistically significant correlation (Nuttbrock & Freudiger, 1991) as they shape long-term and short-term behaviors (McCall & Simmons, 1966).

Identities, meanings, and behaviors are all interconnected and captured within the two interrelated emphases of identity theory: the social-structural approach and the cognitive approach. The social-structural approach focuses on the influence of social structures on identities that subsequently shape behaviors, while the cognitive approach focuses on how internal processes directly shape behaviors (Stets & Burke, 2003; Stryker & Burke, 2000). According to identity theory, identities are cognitive schemas that are affected by social circumstances reinforcing the respective identity. Yet, identities are also cognitive schemas that can be confirmed by “finding or creating [social] situations in which they could be expressed” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 289). In other words, a maternal identity is likely reinforced by social situations in which women perform motherly behaviors like chaperoning children during school trips, helping one’s children with homework, breastfeeding, and engaging in diaper duties. Even in the absence of these activities, mothers may emphasize or construct particular situations in which they enact behaviors associated with a maternal identity. In this way, identity theory posits that an individual’s identity may shape his or her behaviors and these behaviors may, in turn, reinforce the individual’s identity through meanings associated with those behaviors and the salient identity (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Stryker & Burke, 2000).

The interrelated social-structural and cognitive approaches of identity theory and the correlating concepts of identity salience and prominence make this framework particularly useful in better understanding the thought-process and behaviors of criminalized mothers who have experienced incarceration and been released.

### **Identity Salience and Prominence for Criminalized Mothers**

Society may view women offenders with children as *criminals* first and *mothers* second. According to labeling theory, the constant labeling of individuals may reinforce their acceptance of particular identities (Becker, 1963). Based on this logic, women offenders may internalize the criminal identity when constantly labeled as criminals. Braithwaite and Mugford (1994, p. 151) found, however, that it is not the norm to uphold a criminal identity unless there is a personal commitment to such an identity, which is rare. Concepts of identity salience and prominence grasp mothers' innermost ideas and meanings tied to their maternal identity despite the subjective social perceptions about their criminal involvement. Thus, identity salience and prominence are valuable concepts to understand women who self-identify as mothers despite their involvement in the criminal justice system.

As noted by Beth Richie (2001, p. 379), "even in those instances where the nature of the illegal activity and the situations that women found themselves in created a less than optimal environment for child rearing, most women report worrying about their children both before and after they are arrested." For instance, even though many mothers provide for their children without engaging in crime, some mothers who are less financially stable may engage in criminal activity as a means to protect and financially support their children (Byrne & Trew, 2008; Ferraro & Moe, 2003). Common among mothers in general, these mothers made sacrifices to enact a maternal role of caring for their children – albeit doing so by any means necessary. Byrne and Trew (2008, p. 249) found that for these women offenders, specifically, holding an identity as "bad mother" was likely worse than that of a "criminal." This demonstrates how, despite social



perceptions, women offenders may maintain salient maternal identities in their everyday lives.

While incarceration may pose a threat to the enactment of ideals and values associated with motherhood, the maternal identity may remain prominent in their lives as their ideal self and potentially elicit emotional responses when their mothering conflicts with their understanding of motherhood (Arditti, 2012; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001).

### **Motherhood During Maternal Incarceration**

Identity theory notes that most individuals have multiple identities. Incarcerated mothers may possess at least two identities, which include the mother and inmate. Although Schmid and Jones (1991) studied incarcerated males, they found that incarcerated individuals manage dual identities during incarceration by upholding the salient identity before imprisonment as their “personal” identity while the inmate identity is merely “social,” considering the need for survival within these social circumstances. Despite the potential presence of dual identities, incarcerated mothers may face stigma for acting against social norms of both motherhood and femininity (Aiello & McQueeney, 2016; Berry & Eigenberg, 2003). An inmate is a stigmatized “spoiled identity” in which the individual is viewed as ruined, less than the normal human being, and is therefore discriminated against (Goffman, 1963). After all, the correctional setting is a power structure designed to produce criminal identities (Foucault, 1977). Throughout each day of their incarceration, mothers may be constantly reminded of their identity as an inmate – during counts, when spoken to by correctional officers, when entering jail or prison cells. For some mothers, their maternal identity is less salient during incarceration while the inmate identity becomes more salient under the social circumstances; yet, other

mothers may retain the salience of the maternal identity over that of an inmate. Amongst both groups, however, the maternal identity appears to remain a prominent identity that sparks an emotional response when unable to enact their particular ideals of mothering. The following reviews the experiences of mothers who fall in each of the two groups.

### **Inmate versus Mother**

In spite of possible efforts to mother while in a jail or prison setting and being physically separated from their children, women's enactment of motherhood may be undermined by the social-structural limitations of incarceration that enforce an inmate identity. While women may navigate motherhood from behind prison doors, maternal incarceration presents various barriers "dictating the parameters within which women can be parents while incarcerated" (Jensen & DuBeck-Biondo, 2005, p. 123). If interested in calling their children, mothers may be restricted by allotted time frames to do so and the expense to family members from collect calls. Incarcerated mothers often write letters to their children, but children are often dispirited from engaging in this type of exchange because they prefer direct contact with their mothers (Siegel, 2011). Incarceration, however, presents obstacles for those who wish to have such direct contact. For instance, research shows that most incarcerated mothers (54%-61%) do not receive visits from their children (Baunach, 1985; Casey-Acevedo & Bakken, 2002; Mumola, 2000). Limited visitation from children is associated with numerous factors such as the children's ability to visit due to the location of the correctional facility, the costs to visit the facility, the willingness of the caregiver to travel to the facility, the dislike of allotted times during visits, and the displeasure with one's emotional state after a visit (Casey-Acevedo & Bakken, 2002; Enos, 2001; Jensen & DuBeck-Biondo, 2005; Siegel, 2011).

Interestingly, some incarcerated mothers note that they do not want their children to visit them, preferring instead to shield their children from unpleasant prison environments (Baunach, 1985; Jensen & DuBeck-Biondo, 2005). Such limited visitation may interfere with incarcerated mothers' ability to maintain salient maternal identities. Berry and Eigenberg (2003) found that 64% of mothers often worried that their incarceration affected their maternal role, and 55% of mothers often felt as though their children did not receive the maternal attention they needed. According to Siegel (2011, p. 150–151), “even under the best of all possible conditions and even when the individuals are determined to stay in contact...sustaining a relationship between a child and a parent in prison is difficult.”

Amongst substantial barriers between them and their children, some mothers may find their maternal identity less salient during their incarceration but still a prominent identity that remains important to their ideal self. Incarcerated mothers are often viewed by society as “bad” mothers due to their involvement in criminal activity and the associated incarceration. Consistently reminded of these social perceptions and exposed to conflicts in their mothering, some mothers may come to internalize these negative perceptions of themselves as “bad” mothers while they are incarcerated (Arditti & Few, 2006; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). These negative self-perceptions are not without the associated emotions attached. For instance, Dodge and Pogrebin (2001) present narratives of mothers feeling “horrible” about their absence and wishing everything were a bad dream. Arditti (2012, p. 62) also discusses the psychological distress of imprisonment on mothers:

Many incarcerated women, regardless of the reasons that led to their imprisonment, are arguably struggling to mother under the most extreme and stigmatizing

circumstance. It stands to reason that the gap between internalized ideals about the good mother and their self-perceptions gives rise to distress and feelings of inadequacy, suggesting that maternal identity is prominent (i.e., associated with strong emotions per Stryker, 1980) for many women during their confinement.

Such emotional turmoil from maternal incarceration is tied to the conflict with women's ideal notions of mothering. This emotional response to their diminished contact and involvement demonstrates the prominence of their maternal identity even during incarceration (Arditti, 2012).

### **Mother versus Inmate**

Given the limitations for incarcerated women to immerse themselves in other conventional roles, maternal roles may become even more salient (Foster, 2011). Some mothers may retain a salient maternal identity during their incarceration by finding the social situations – albeit behind bars – in which they are able to enact that identity. Mothers can deal with the “spoiled identity” and stigma of being an inmate by mastering behaviors deemed as off limits to inmates – mothering (see Goffman, 1963, p. 10). Despite normative constructions of motherhood, incarcerated mothers may enact motherhood by working around prevalent constraints but that may go unnoticed by those on the outside who are unacquainted with their maternal engagements and aspirations. The following intends to draw light to some of the ways incarcerated mothers may enact motherhood, and engage in oppositional identity work opposing the inmate identity (see Aiello & McQueeney, 2016) and maintaining a salient maternal identity in the face of incarceration.

Despite the social conditions of incarceration that sets restrictions on physical interactions, mothers may engage in specific behaviors they deem as meaningful to a maternal identity (Aiello & McQueeney, 2016; Jensen & DuBeck-Biondo, 2005). For

instance, women describe efforts navigating motherhood by arranging and managing guardianship of their children during the incarceration. In fact, mothers are likely to rely on family members to support the children in their absence (Mumola, 2000; Sharp et al., 1999; Siegel, 2011). This introduces conversations with temporary guardians about the wellbeing of their children. Women's direct communication with their children during incarceration aided in their ability to perform maternal identities. For instance, Jensen and DuBeck-Biondo's (2005, p. 139) investigation revealed that:

Providing emotional support and guidance to their children was considered sufficient evidence [to the women] of behaving as a mother while in jail. While a few stated that it was difficult, most of the women did not hesitate when asked what they do as mothers in jails. These activities were largely restricted to conversational interaction with children during telephone calls or visits, though letters were also cited as ways in which the mothers engaged in mothering acts.

This demonstrates the enactment of meaningful behaviors the women associate with mothering, which includes emotional support and guidance by way of the communication they were allowed. The women's ability to provide their children with this emotional support and guidance reinforces the salience of their maternal identity. According to Aiello and McQueeney (2016, p. 43): despite the stigma they face as incarcerated women with children and "far from feeling like 'bad' mothers – these incarcerated women embraced motherhood as a valued identity." As Breakwell (1986, p. 77) notes, "threats to the structure of identity are short-lived because, as soon as they gain conscious recognition, the individual will initiate strategies designed to obliterate them." This illustrates the variety of ways in which mothers navigate motherhood during their incarceration and maintain a prominent maternal identity, even going beyond social norms of motherhood and mothering. This also allows mothers to maintain a salient maternal identity despite the physical distance.

Given that maternal engagement changes over time, it is likely that conditions faced during incarceration may shape mothers' engagement and maternal self-perceptions after imprisonment (Arditti & Few, 2006). In fact, maternal incarceration and post-incarceration motherhood are interrelated given that the presence of potential adjustments, challenges, and experiences faced *during* incarceration may have a meaningful influence on motherhood *after* incarceration – whether negative or positive. On the one hand, barriers to enact motherhood during incarceration may be a potential detriment to women's psychological wellbeing and may negatively shape mother-child experiences upon mothers' release (Hairston, 1991). Such an adverse effect may be tied to mothers' decreased ability to enact maternal behaviors amidst troublesome circumstances that are prevalent upon their return. On the other hand, mothers may instead create the social situations in which they can enact their maternal identity. This approach is consistent with the more positive response in which women experience heightened self-perceptions as “good” mothers upon their release. For instance, in their study on mothering and family life during women's return to society, Arditti and Few (2006) found that women's perceived enactment of motherhood shifted along with their incarceration: 28% believed they were very good mothers prior to their incarceration, while only 14% believed they were very good mothers during their incarceration and as many as 46% believed they were very good mothers after their release. This encouraging shift may be a result of the transition to a more encouraging social circumstance, allowing for the reinforcement of the maternal identity.

### **Motherhood for Formerly Incarcerated Mothers**

As previously described, salient identities may shape associated behaviors; “to understand in any detail what a person is likely to do, therefore, we must look to his [or her] self-conceptions, to the contents of his [or her] role-identities, for it is through them that the demands of social structures are filtered” (McCall & Simmons, 1966, p. 233). Yet, formerly incarcerated mothers are often faced with at least two identities, which include the mother and the former prisoner.

The coexistence of these two identities – mother and former prisoner – may create a conflict in meeting the obligations and expectations associated with each identity. Upon their release, former prisoners are obliged to refrain from criminal activity and expected to reintegrate back into society. Upon their release, women may hope to enact behaviors associated with their maternal identity such as providing their children with care and support. Leverentz (2014) found, however, that familial expectations to provide care and support affected efforts to reintegrate back into society as former prisoners – efforts that included a presence at work and attendance at recovery meetings. While the navigation of motherhood may impact post-incarceration reentry, the opposite is also true. Specifically, the social-structural barriers they may encounter as ex-prisoners may influence the navigation of motherhood upon their release. Such social-structural barriers common among formerly incarcerated mothers include obstacles with finding employment, gaining or maintaining custody of children, obtaining suitable and permanent housing, and coping with addictions. Thus, formerly incarcerated mothers may be faced with numerous problems for a constructive post-incarceration process, hindering their ability to enact maternal behaviors and maintain salient maternal identities; yet the personal

commitment to maternal identities can influence salient maternal identities while rejecting identification as former prisoners.

One of the leading scholars on desistance research, Shadd Maruna, argues that desistance from crime entails an understanding of criminal pasts as well as the development of a reformed prosocial identity that is noncriminal in nature (Maruna, 2001). While maternal identities are broadly considered prosocial because they are generally associated with positive characteristics, a former prisoner is regarded as having a “spoiled identity” and deemed by society as less than the normal human being (Goffman, 1963). Thus, while salient maternal identities (over that of former prisoners) may be more conducive to desisting from crime, salient identities as former prisoners may be detrimental to constructive progress and can negatively influence the mothers’ re-offending.

Though desistance from criminal activity entails the prominence of a reformed prosocial identity (Maruna, 2001), desistance is also shaped by factors external to the individual (Bui & Morash, 2010; Farrall et al., 2011). Children are often described as a source of internal motivation for mothers to desist from crime (Kreager et al., 2010; Leverentz, 2014; Sharpe, 2015), but external socioeconomic and social-structural obstacles presented to formerly incarcerated mothers may hinder the feasibility of desistance. Everything considered,

The combination of the competing demands may seriously interfere with successful reintegration: The woman will need an apartment to regain custody of their children, she will need a job to get an apartment, she will need to get treatment for her addiction to be able to work, and initial contact with her children may only be possible during business hours if they are in custody of the state (Richie, 2001, p. 381).

This demonstrates that while personal commitment may retain a salient maternal identity



and encourage mothers to desist from crime, the social and legal treatment of former prisoners might still interfere with their desistance process. Thus, it is important to understand how women engage with their maternal identities in order to support their reintegration back into society and their efforts to desist from crime.

Given the conflicts between women's maternal identities and identities as former prisoners, we must understand how women navigate being mothers together with being former prisoners since this helps us counteract recidivism and better support the development or continuation of *positive* behaviors upon their release.

### **Restricted Opportunities and the Penalization of “Other” Mothers**

Although maternal behaviors are motivated by a maternal identity and its associated meanings, there are variations in the meanings and enactment of motherhood; this may be particularly true for mothers with varying degrees of mother-child contact and across different racial-ethnic backgrounds – groups that are often overlooked in general discussions of motherhood. Therefore, in order to understand the realities of navigating motherhood post-incarceration, this must be explored among mothers with varying degrees of contact with their children post-incarceration and across the racial-ethnic backgrounds of these formerly incarcerated mothers.

### **Mothering as a Construct of Maternal Contact**

Embedded into the normative understanding of motherhood are principles of intensive mothering in which mothers live up to societal expectations of extensive mother-child contact (see Hays, 1996). Given socially constructed interpretations of motherhood that emphasize mothers' work and mother-child relationships, “not all women who give birth have their (potential) identities as mothers socially validated”

(McMahon, 1995, p. 18). The “proper” family context and degree of mother-child contact is emphasized by formal and social treatment of women who do not fit dominant constructions of motherhood. This emphasis on “proper” ways is complicated by involvement in the criminal justice system as it further penalizes mothers whom clash with these social constructs (Eaton, 1986; Flavin, 2001; Kruttschnitt, 1984).

For instance, mothers who do not live with their children have a greater likelihood of being reprimanded in the criminal justice system, including incarceration (Flavin, 2001; Kruttschnitt, 1984). Flavin (2001, p. 630) found that “among women, the likelihood of incarceration is greatest for those women whose lack of ties to children and/or family most threaten conventional gender role expectations because they fail to care for dependents or to be dependent on someone else.” Specifically, nonresidential mothers are punished more severely during sentencing than mothers who live with their children, but nonresidential mothers are punished even more severely when they live with other family members instead (Flavin, 2001). Social expectations of mothers as primary caretakers and the societal assumptions that this is best performed while in residency both influence punitive treatment towards nonresidential mothers.

Despite this differential treatment towards women in the criminal justice system who diverge from normative constructions of motherhood (like living with and having custody over their children), a maternal identity may remain prominent in their sense of self and may retain its salience according to personal meanings associated with motherhood. Rather than emphasizing the experiences of being residential mothers, society should also consider other varying degrees of mother-child contact to examine mothers’ own interpretations of their mothering behaviors, without limiting these

narratives to mothers who fit the norm of intensive mothering (see Hays, 1996). For instance, formerly incarcerated women may still maintain maternal identities without contact with their children. Yet, due to the little attention given to this group, the questions remains of how they are able to maintain maternal identities without contact and how salient their maternal identities are in everyday life post-incarceration without maternal contact.

There is an assumption that if they do not have contact with their children, these mothers are not likely living with the child; with that being said, mothers who do not live with their child may still maintain communication. Thus, it is valuable to explore how formerly incarcerated women navigate motherhood when they do not live with their children but maintain contact. As previously described, communication with children helped some women maintain salient maternal identities during their incarceration when they were physically separated from their children (see Jensen & DuBeck-Biondo, 2005). The same may hold true for mothers living separately from their children post-incarceration. Therefore, in addition to formerly incarcerated mothers who live with their children, this research project also includes formerly incarcerated mothers who do not live with their children but have contact with their children and formerly incarcerated mothers who do not have contact with their children. It is important to keep in mind, however, that residential expectations may differ according to children's age – with mothers expected to live with under-aged children more so than adult children, making their children's age an important aspect in understanding the navigation of motherhood. Thus, in comparatively exploring the narratives of these three groups, attention is given to the children's ages.

### **Mothering as a Racialized Construct**

The concept of motherhood is a racialized construct in that it is shaped by ideas and beliefs about race and, more specifically, embedded in class-based hegemony of White, middle-class ideologies of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996; Roberts, 1993). Yet, existing research demonstrates some variation across racial-ethnic lines in women's living arrangements with their children (Enos, 2001; Snell & Morton, 1994), work achievements (Baunach, 1985; Peterson & Krivo, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), custodial arrangements with family members (Bresler & Lewis, 1983; Enos, 2001), and parenting attitudes and behaviors (Jambunathan et al., 2000; Julian et al., 1994; Waters, 1999). Despite such racial-ethnic differences, the perpetuation of a racialized construct may trigger prejudiced assessments of mothers of color that are not grounded in knowledge about their experiences. Arendell (2000, p. 1201) argues that “not only is American society increasingly diverse, but the experiences and perceptions of minority women – as legitimate and valuable in their own right and not as measures by which White, heterosexual, middle-class mothering is reified – have been given too little attention.”

Less attention is given to the experiences of mothers of color whom, despite maternal identities, face restricted access to the social and structural opportunities to enact motherhood. Racial-ethnic minorities are faced with social-structural practices like racial discrimination and prejudices that create “divergent social worlds” (Peterson & Krivo, 2010; see also Alexander, 2010; Massey & Denton, 1993). The presence of “divergent social worlds” promotes disparity in areas such as employment and educational attainment (Collins, 2009; Peterson & Krivo, 2010). For instance, having

children is costly but White women are more likely to have permanent and full-time work prior to their incarceration whereas women who are not White are more likely to have temporary and part-time jobs prior to their incarceration (Baunach, 1985). Such differences have serious implications for women of color's ability to financially provide for their children. And still, the restricted social and structural opportunities for racial-ethnic minorities to mother is *further* complicated by their involvement in the criminal justice system. Mothers of color disproportionately encounter structural reprimands within the criminal justice system when they do not fit societal ideals of mothering. As written by Flavin (2001, p. 630), "Black women offenders are subjected to a double-edged sword, rewarded if they are perceived as good parents but punished more severely if they are not." However, often compared to Whites along this ideology of intensive mothering, Black mothers are often perceived as undeserving and unfit mothers, further shaping perceptions of them as subordinate to White mothers (Roberts, 1993). They may continue to face structural reprimands for diverging from such racialized social constructions despite the prominence of a maternal identity in their lives post-incarceration. Due to these obstacles typically faced in broader society and within the criminal justice system, researchers should bear in mind the post-incarceration maternal adjustments specifically experienced by racial-ethnic minorities.

### **Racial-Ethnic Variations in Motherhood**

Despite knowledge gained from existing research on mothering while Black, a White/non-White racial dichotomy is also limiting in our knowledge given that racial-ethnic minority groups are often perceived collectively as a homogenous group. Instead, it is imperative that researchers investigate the similarities and differences *within*

minority groups – particularly amongst Hispanic, African American, and West Indian mothers. Why? Faced with numerous obstacles in their daily lives, these three ethnic groups may “have more experience in actually engaging in mothering activities even when they are physically distant from their children” (Berry & Eigenberg, 2003, p. 115). Research on Hispanics, African Americans, and West Indians discuss the role of extended family members and the extent of their help in supportive, shared mothering (see Bermúdez et al., 2014; Jacobs & Mollborn, 2012; Smith, 1962; Stack & Burton, 1994). Research of the extended family’s role as a support system not only reveals the expectations of familial support with caregiving during a mother’s incarceration, but also after a mother’s incarceration. Yet, there are important differences between Hispanics, African Americans, and West Indians that are often overlooked in criminological research but are important to consider when studying formerly incarcerated individuals to accurately inform practitioners and policymakers.

Close examination of African Americans, Hispanics and West Indians demonstrate cultural variations in kinship networks, differences in socio-economic factors such as poverty rates, and socio-structural distinctions in place of birth as a native of the United States. Hispanic and African American mothers share similar experiences in mothering as they raise their children amidst discrimination and oppression (Bermúdez et al., 2014; Collins, 1994; Ladner, 1995; Roberts, 1993); yet, the stronger familial support and informal networks that Hispanics encounter may mitigate negative circumstances creating a “Latino Paradox” or “Hispanic Effect” (Steffensmeier et al. 2010; Steffensmeier et al. 2011). This may shape the racial-ethnic differences during their incarceration and upon their release. For instance, though not statistically significant,

research suggests that Hispanic mothers received more visits from their children (12.9 per year) than Black mothers (10.8 per year) (Casey-Acevedo & Bakken, 2002). Some Hispanic mothers may also engage in transnational mothering in which they work and/or live in a different country than their country of origin where their children reside (Colen, 1995; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). Scholars argue that this transnational motherhood shapes a unique perception of what motherhood entails – caregiving and support even within long-distance living arrangements (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). This understanding of motherhood can mitigate the impact of physical distance while incarcerated and preserve a salient maternal identity given that they may be more accustomed to the general concept of mothering from a distance. Though discussed less often in comparison to Hispanic women, West Indian women also engage in transnational motherhood but may differ in their experiences in comparison to Hispanic women.

While Hispanics and West Indians may encounter similar obstacles as (potential) immigrants, they may also vary in their experiences. Criminological research reveals that women offenders often receive little help from the fathers of their children (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001), yet Census data shows ethnic differences in poverty rates that widen when women are primary caregivers. According to 2011-2013 three-year estimates of New York City using the American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), West Indian families have lower poverty rates (14%) than the poverty rates of Hispanic families (27%). For female-headed households without the presence of a husband, this gap in poverty rate further widens between West Indians (20%) and Hispanics (42%). Not only do women experience greater poverty rates in the absence of a partner in the home but the impact of this absence appears to be greater for Hispanic women than West

Indian women. This may shape differences in their experiences and their ability to reintegrate back into society post-incarceration. In addition to this, while both groups may come from less developed countries relative to the United States, West Indians are more likely than Hispanics to actually be born outside of the United States (65% and 41%, respectively). This may also shape disparities in cultural beliefs and experiences that persist while in the United States, but may also shape one's standing upon entry. For instance, Nancy Foner (1987, p. 118) notes that relative to Black Americans in the United States, "West Indians have come from societies where Blacks are a majority and where Black skin is less of a barrier to upward mobility." She notes that in addition to their status as immigrants, West Indians may be more representative among some professions due to the upward mobility they are able to experience in their home countries (Foner, 1987). Waters (1999), however, notes that class-based differences among West Indians may impair the upward mobility of those less fortunate and present a more challenging experience upon their entry.

This review demonstrates the racial-ethnic variations that must be considered in women's experiences of motherhood. Thus, scholars should refrain from homogenizing racial-ethnic minority mothers given that this limits their capacity to investigate potential sociocultural distinctions in the meanings, expectations and experiences of motherhood. Yet, this homogenization of minority groups is often done in criminological work, which does not adequately address potential variations among these groups. Taking into account experiences of incarceration for mothers who differ, particularly across racial-ethnic lines, we must investigate how African American, West Indian, and Hispanic mothers navigate motherhood upon their release from imprisonment.



## Summary

This chapter has illustrated the influence of self-identification on one's behaviors.

According to Burke and Reitzes (1981, p. 91):

Identities influence the choices made. The activity that results from the choice has meanings that correspond to, reinforce, and display the identity meanings of the individual... Viewed in this way, an identity is like a compass helping us steer a course of interaction in a sea of social meaning.

Yet, within this “sea of social meaning” associated with maternal identities and behaviors, mothers of varying racial-ethnic backgrounds may be faced with disparate structural opportunities to enact motherhood according to their ideals. While racial-ethnic differences are extensively examined in sociological literature and women's studies, the intersection of this examination within criminological work is lacking or – when considered – dismissive of unique racial-ethnic experiences and comparatively scripted to support the racialized construction of motherhood. The maternal experiences of women in these racial-ethnic minority groups may be further complicated after a period of incarceration. Given this knowledge, this research examines the influence of maternal identities on the navigation of motherhood amidst racial-ethnic meanings of motherhood and as they simultaneously tackle reentry barriers as former prisoners in which contact with children varies drastically.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY AND PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### **Research Questions and Goals**

This study asks two questions: (1) How and to what extent do women's identities as mothers impact their desires, decisions and behaviors after their release from imprisonment? (2) How does the post-incarceration navigation of motherhood for African American, West Indian, and Hispanic women influence various aspects of their reintegration after imprisonment, and what role does racial-ethnic background play in this process? Specifically, I assess how their post-incarceration navigation of motherhood influences their reintegration through desires, decisions, and behaviors concerning:

- Childrearing Practices
- Employment and Finances
- Recovery from Histories of Addiction
- Custody of Children & Living Arrangements

#### **Research Design**

The use of qualitative interviews is an ideal approach to study the navigation of post-incarceration motherhood because interviews can capture complex phenomena from the perspective of those who are most knowledgeable about their experiences. Through interviews, formerly incarcerated women provide their narratives of desires, decisions, and behaviors that are often undetected in other direct data collection methods. The use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews allows investigation of mother-child relations as well as racial-ethnic differences and similarities among women's accounts of post-

incarceration motherhood.

It is important to study racial-ethnic differences among formerly incarcerated mothers because the existing literature is focused on Black/White dichotomies (Baunach, 1985; Bresler & Lewis, 1983; Enos, 2001; Snell & Morton, 1994). Some government reports on offenders use classifications such as “White” and “Black or African American alone,” which typically excludes Hispanics and Latinos whom are categorized as a separate group (see Durose et al. 2014; Minton 2013).<sup>1</sup> This classification of “Black or African American alone,” however, may blur ethnic differences as that of one racial group while also highlighting the inclusion of African American individuals above that of other ethnic groups. Though many scholars use the racial term “Black” to refer to both African American and West Indians, Waters (1999, p. 65) found that West Indians “did not want to be seen as simply ‘Black American’ [and, in addition, they] disliked the term ‘African American’ because, unlike the term ‘Black,’ it did not leave room for ethnic distinctiveness within the racial umbrella.” Existing quantitative data sets may be limited in their ability to differentiate between African American women and West Indian women, labeling both under the “Black” racial umbrella or classifying the racial group and its ethnic subgroups as “Black or African American alone.” In addition, quantitative

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<sup>1</sup> Though a “Hispanic/Latino” ethnic group may be included in criminal justice reports (see Durose et al., 2014; Minton, 2013) and the terms Hispanic and Latino/a may overlap for some individuals, there is also a distinct difference that is often misconstrued: geography in comparison to language. Specifically, Latinos are groups from Latin American countries while Hispanics refers to groups from locations where Spanish is primarily the spoken language. For example, Hondurans are considered both Hispanic and Latino given that Honduras is located in Latin American and Spanish is the dominant language of the country. Brazilians, however, speak Portuguese so they are considered Latin American, not Hispanic. The individuals from Spain are not considered Latin Americans due to the location of the country, but they are considered Hispanic due to the dominant language spoken. Thus, this study specifically refers to the experiences of Hispanics – that is, individuals from Spanish-speaking territories.

research may be limited in its ability to include the Hispanic population, deeming this group's presence statistically insignificant and reinforcing the focus on Black/White dichotomies. Qualitative data, however, is particularly useful as an accurate representation of formerly incarcerated individuals otherwise presented along a Black/White dichotomy. The inclusion of West Indian and Hispanic women, in addition to African American women, allows for more adequate assistance through the unique issues they may encounter given the presence of cultural variations in kinship networks and parenting styles as well as socio-economic differences in factors like poverty rates (for a review, see the previous chapter).

This study also includes a comparative feature across varying degrees of contact with children – specifically, mothers living with their children, mothers not living with their children but remaining in contact, and mothers without contact. This comparative feature goes beyond formal determinations of custody that may not be representative of mother-child relationships, but considers the complexity of this interaction, which is often overlooked. In fact, mothers can legally have custody without living with their child or having contact with their children (Siegel, 2011). Thus, instead of focusing on custodial arrangements, I study the narratives of mothers living with their children as a more accurate indication of contact. In addition to this group, I also studied mothers who did not live with children but maintained communication. By including this group, this allowed me to also capture the nuances of motherhood beyond the traditional residential mother that is most frequently studied. The same holds true in including women who did not have contact with their children, but still considered themselves mothers as evident through self-selection into this study. Studying this third group was particularly useful in

exploring how they maintained maternal identities even without contact, especially when society may deem contact as a necessary component of motherhood.

### **Sampling Strategy**

Women interviewed for this study resided in New York City, which was ideal for several reasons. First, the state of New York – and New York City more specifically – is often described as one of the landing grounds into the U.S. for both Hispanics and West Indians (Bryce-Laporte, 1987; Kent, 2007; Sutton, 1987; Waters, 1999).<sup>2</sup> This provided me with a ready opportunity to include women from these groups, in addition to African Americans, in my study. Indeed, though my study did not explicitly distinguish between individuals who are foreign born versus native to the U.S., it is notable that from 2008 to 2013, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic were consistently the top two countries of origin among foreign-born individuals in New York State custody (Clark, 2008; Clark, 2009; Clark, 2010; Clark, 2011; Clark, 2012; Clark, 2013).

Initial recruitment followed a purposive sampling strategy with the objective of recruiting 45 formerly incarcerated mothers, interviewing a balanced number of African American (N = 15), West Indian (N = 15) and Hispanic mothers (N = 15). I sought to purposefully recruit formerly incarcerated women in these groups who identify as mothers and who have varying degrees of contact with their children: mothers living with their children, mothers not living with their children but have contact with them, and mothers without contact with their children. The women's self-selection into this study was a demonstration of their self-identification as mothers, which is necessary in

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, New York City communities like Washington Heights and Jackson Heights are known for their large Hispanic populations, while communities such as Flatbush and Jamaica are known for their large West Indian populations.

studying how maternal *identities* shape the reentry experience of formerly incarcerated mothers. During the recruitment stage, I also found it necessary to narrow the selection criteria more explicitly. Several formerly incarcerated women self-identified as mothers to their pet dogs and cats when describing their interest in participation, and they were excluded from the study. In addition, while research demonstrates the presence of maternal roles within so-called ‘fictive’ family ties among women of color (Collins 1994; see also O’Reilly 2014), to maintain consistency, I limited the study to mothers with biological children. Though my sampling only included biological mothers, study participants were asked if there were any other children they were involved in raising, either previously or at the time of the interview. This allowed for consideration of maternal involvement in the lives of other children despite the primary focus on women’s relationships with their biological children.

To identify eligible study participants, I chose not go through official criminal justice (parole/probation) personnel for recruitment. This can hinder individuals’ willingness to participate and might influence the substance of interviews. To better ensure that willing individuals would feel open to have a detailed discussion of their experiences, I maintained no affiliation with the criminal justice system and introduced myself as a student when speaking with potential participants.

Participants were recruited through oral presentations and flyers at local programs, coalition meetings, and events in New York City that have an interest in and involvement with formerly incarcerated women. During the first month of data collection (November 2014), I recruited primarily at a nonprofit organization that provides formerly incarcerated mothers with a variety of resources including supportive housing (for both

them and their children), job readiness workshops, an afterschool program for their children, and access to donated clothing. The first group of eligible participants (N = 9) was interviewed at the program location, as I identified additional sites for recruitment where subsequent participants were recruited.

After initial recruitment, I located further participants through a more specific form of purposive sampling – theoretical sampling. According to Kathy Charmaz, a pioneer in theoretical sampling, the use of theoretical sampling strategies can protect researchers from “becoming stuck in unfocused analyses” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 97). Theoretical sampling is instrumental in developing theories from data given that it entails an interchange between sampling and data analysis. After preliminary data analysis, further recruitment strategies are driven by the need to develop the sample to further expand upon conceptual themes and patterns emerging in the data (Charmaz, 2006; Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). After my review of preliminary interviews, further recruitment focused on mothers with experiences in the shelter system. I found that seven of my initial interviews were with formerly incarcerated mothers who described battles with homelessness and the shelter system, and who discussed the impact of these particular living situations on their ability to mother. I chose to engage in theoretical sampling in order to further refine my analysis of the shelter system within my emerging theoretical focus on maternal experiences shaping reintegration.<sup>3</sup> To reach additional mothers with experiences of homelessness and shelter stays, I posted flyers at various shelters in Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan. At some shelters, I received hostility from

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<sup>3</sup> See the Data Analysis section below for a more detailed description of the data analysis component of this back and forth process of grounded theory.

security guards as they quickly inquired into my presence, told me no visitors were allowed, and notified me of prohibited items.<sup>4</sup> I also felt some resistance from shelter personnel who did not seem interested in my study and dismissed me as quickly as possible.<sup>5</sup> This resistance from shelter staff and security, however, did not negatively impact recruitments since word of mouth played the most vital role in reaching additional study participants. I was able to recruit seven additional participants staying at shelters, four additional participants with previous experience in the shelter system, and one who did not know where she would sleep the night of her interview.

In addition, despite my goal of building a comparative sample across racial-ethnic background and degrees of contact, I found it particularly difficult to recruit formerly incarcerated mothers without contact with their children and formerly incarcerated mothers of West Indian background. In fact, in the first few months of data collection, I had only interviewed three mothers who did not have contact with a child. Yet, I found these interviews quite revealing, especially with regard to how these mothers framed their narratives around the ‘good times’ in their mother-child relationships or focused on the children with whom they held contact or could potentially develop contact. To recruit additional women in this category, I left flyers at legal information centers associated with Family Court, and also used word of mouth to reach mothers without contact with their children. After these efforts I was able to recruit six additional mothers who did not

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<sup>4</sup> Notably, however, the security guards at these locations were designated Department of Homeless Services (D.H.S.) peace officers, trained in crisis management and understanding of mental illness.

<sup>5</sup> I did not receive this type of resistance at a family shelter for women and their children. Instead, staff at this location allowed me to set a table on the main floor for recruitment purposes. Security at this location was also more lax as it did not include metal detectors or D.H.S. peace officers, like other locations.



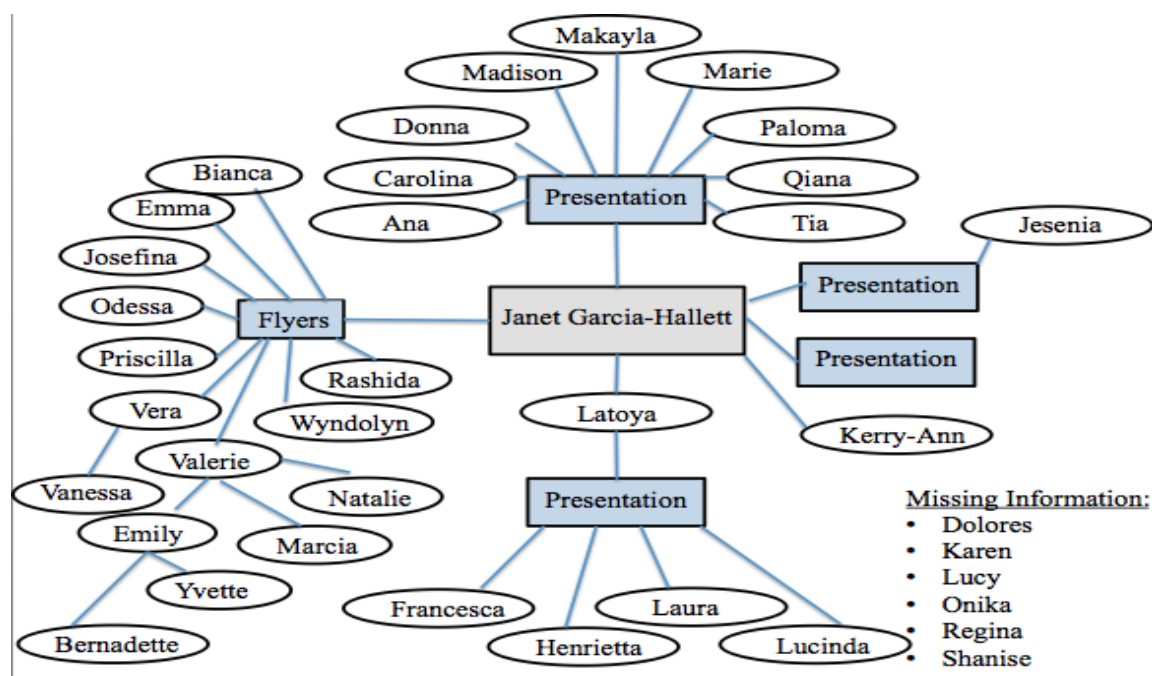
have contact with either their only child or at least one of multiple children. Of them, two learned of the study from previous study participants, three saw flyers posted at housing programs and the courthouse, and one was informed of the study by the Program Coordinator at a women's reentry program.

In addition, though the majority of my first interviews were with African American mothers, the first two interviews with West Indian mothers repeatedly touched upon particular criminal behaviors and accompanying familial responses that were distinguished from the familial responses of other ethnic groups. In an attempt to recruit additional West Indian mothers, I travelled to highly populated West Indian communities in New York City including Flatbush (in the borough of Brooklyn) and Jamaica (in the borough of Queens). I used this opportunity to post flyers in storefronts, provide flyers to daycare personnel, and leave flyers at various nonprofit organizations and health centers that provided generic services to community residents. These efforts were also supplemented by numerous phone calls and emails to representatives at these organizations and health centers. While I was unable to recruit a large number of West Indian mothers through these particular efforts, I managed to recruit six additional participants, which I consider a success given the insights I received from service providers and West Indian colleagues about my recruitment challenges. One woman at a West Indian association noted that it would be difficult for me to reach West Indian mothers who are or have been involved in the criminal justice system because they are "so down low." This notion was repeated by a man leading a nonprofit organization who believed West Indian families had a "high level of intolerance" regarding incarceration, which keeps them "as hush-hush as possible." One colleague of Jamaican background

warned me that this was a “hard target group...especially coming from a culture where the incarcerated are damn near outcasted.” The issue of deportation also arose as a colleague noted: “West Indians without papers try to stay far away from the system because it is very likely that you will get deported.” Yet, they were considered unique in comparison to other ethnic groups at risk of deportation, depending on immigration status (i.e., Hispanics who were not U.S. citizens).

There were a number of ways in which women demonstrated an interest in participating in my study. I gave four informal presentations, including one tabling session, which yielded 14 interviews. Posted flyers yielded 9 women who contacted me about their participation. In addition to the 2 study participants I recruited directly, 6 participants were recruited by word of mouth from previous participants. Lastly, it is unknown how the remaining 6 participants were specifically recruited, whether via flyer or word of mouth. See Figure 1 for a graphic illustration of the recruitment process.

Figure 1: Recruitment Process



## **Interview Guide and Procedures**

Once mothers demonstrated an interest to be interviewed, we arranged a meeting time and location. In accordance with their preferences, mothers were interviewed at programs used for recruitment (N = 11), in their homes or the home of a family member (N = 4), at shelters (N = 2), at schools where they were enrolled, employed, or acquainted (N = 3), and at local eateries such as cafés, McDonald's, Burger King, and iHop, among others (N = 17). We began by reviewing the consent form. I described the study and its potential risks and benefits; noted the voluntary nature of participation, including the options of withdrawing, skipping uncomfortable questions or taking a break; and I clarified the steps I would take to ensure their identity remained anonymous. After reviewing the consent form, I asked mothers if they were still interested in continuing with an interview. At this stage, no one declined to participate nor withdrew from the study during the interview. Interview data were collected from November 2014 to October 2015. A total of 37 study participants were interviewed. The interviews lasted from 39 minutes to 2.5 hours, with an average of approximately 1.5 hours duration. Of the 37 mothers who were interviewed, only 2 opted not to be audio-recorded; in these cases, I typed up their narratives on a laptop computer during the interviews. All other interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The semi-structured interview guide consisted of questions pertaining to the women's perceptions of motherhood, interpretations of mothering, and insights regarding the expectations placed on them as mothers. In addition, our discussions probed the place of motherhood in women's desires, decisions and behaviors related to post-incarceration living arrangements, educational attainment, employment, recovery from histories of

addiction, child custody, and childrearing practices. Due to the importance of previous life circumstances in understanding the navigation of motherhood and reintegration post-incarceration, the interview guide included questions about life circumstances pre-incarceration and during incarceration in order to consider factors that may have an impact on post-incarceration motherhood. Once study participants noted their ethnic identities, I probed deeper into their nationalities and relevant experiences with living and visiting the countries mentioned, whether they were foreign-born or native-born with ethnic ties to another country. I also asked the women about personal experiences and decisions associated with their ethnicities. Finally, I asked mothers to describe their neighborhood and the presence and use of services in their neighborhood in order to obtain an understanding of the communities where they lived and the community role as women navigate motherhood during their reentry (see Appendix A).

Interviews could have been conducted in either English or Spanish depending on the mothers' preferences, but all interviews were conducted in English. This may be due to a number of reasons. First, given to my appearance as a brown-skinned woman, I am often mistaken for someone who is not a native Spanish-speaker and this confusion may have discouraged mothers from approaching me at recruitment events if Spanish was their primary language. Second, I recruited largely at locations where English was the dominant language spoken albeit with bilingual personnel available. This remained true despite my deliberate recruitment in predominantly Spanish-speaking neighborhoods. Third, even though I posted and distributed both English- and Spanish-language flyers at each recruitment location, I received no calls from mothers who only spoke Spanish. This may be tied to the previous point regarding recruitment at locations that were

predominantly English-speaking. Finally, while no mothers called who did not speak English, some of the mothers were fluent in both English and Spanish. When I received calls from bilingual mothers, our interviews were conducted in the language spoken at the time of scheduling – English.

Even though all interviews were conducted in English, six mothers incorporated other languages or dialects into their interviews, which was typically done when telling a story. One Haitian mother, Marie, occasionally spoke Haitian Creole during her interview, and I consulted two Haitian colleagues for an accurate translation of these accounts. One mother, Jesenia, incorporated both Spanish and Italian, yet only saying one Italian word during her interview. One mother, Vanessa, did not speak Spanish or Garifuna<sup>6</sup> but in demonstrating her knowledge of a few Garifuna words, she and I simultaneously said “good afternoon” in Garifuna: *buiti rabanweyu*. Three mothers – Priscilla, Francesca, and Emma – spoke Spanish at some point during their interviews. What I found particularly interesting was that Emma occasionally incorporated Spanish-language conversations into her interview but upon the conclusion of the interview, we spoke with an interchange between English and Spanish (informally known as “Spanglish”). She was one of the two mothers to opt out of being audio-recorded. I wondered if she felt more comfortable speaking Spanglish after the interview given that it was more of a conversation in which I was not typing as she spoke. I don’t know whether she would have spoken in Spanglish during the interview if it were audio-recorded. See Table 1 below for an alphabetical list of all 37 participants, including relevant

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<sup>6</sup> The Garifuna language belongs to the Arawak language family, and is the language of the Garifuna people in Honduras, Guatemala, Belize, and Nicaragua.

characteristics.

All study participants were compensated for their time,<sup>7</sup> which was beneficial during recruitment as an additional incentive. They were given either a \$25 metro card or a \$25 gift card to Pathmark supermarket, Duane Reade/Walgreens pharmacy, or Staples office supply. At the time of the interview, they had the opportunity to choose from a selection of retailers that best accommodated their interests or to choose a metro card to use in New York City's extensive public transit system. The most frequently requested compensation was the Duane Reade/Walgreens gift card with 19 requests, followed by 10 requests for metro cards, 7 requests for Pathmark gift cards, and 1 request for a Staples gift card. Study participants often explained their interest in particular options, for instance, noting that the Duane Reade/Walgreens gift card could be used at the store's pharmacy and the metro card could be used for transportation to and from work. At the conclusion of some interviews, women prepared to use the gift cards they had just received. One mother, who lived in a shelter with her daughter, requested a Pathmark gift card and asked her teenage daughter to prepare for their grocery shopping with the gift card. In two instances, I was present with study participants as they made their purchases. One mother used her Pathmark gift card to purchase milk for the newest addition to her family – her grandson. Another used her Duane Reade/Walgreens gift card soon after our interview to buy a card for Mother's Day, which was the day after our interview, in addition to other items.

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<sup>7</sup> Research participants were compensated using funds received from the 2014 American Society of Criminology's Graduate Fellowship for Ethnic Minorities (currently known as the Ruth Peterson Fellowship for Racial and Ethnic Diversity).

Table 1: Descriptive Table of Study Participants

Participant	Age	Time (Last) Incarcerated (time in weeks)	Time Since Release (time in weeks)	Race/Ethnicity	Children Living With	Children Not Living With, But Contact	Children Without Contact	Work
Ana	41	<b>7 Months</b> (30.1 Weeks)	<b>1 Year, 2 Months</b> (60.7 Weeks)	Hispanic; Other	3 1Adult; 2Minors			No
Bernadette	63	<b>3 Months</b> (12.9 Weeks)	<b>14 Years</b> (729.4 Weeks)	African American		4 Adults	2 Adults	No
Bianca	47	<b>8 Months</b> (34.4 Weeks)	<b>2 Years</b> (104.2 Weeks)	African American	1 Minor	1 Adult		No
Carolina	41	<b>3 Years</b> (156.3 Weeks)	<b>1.5 Months</b> (6.5 Weeks)	Hispanic		2 Minors		No
Dolores	53	<b>6 Months</b> (25.8 Weeks)	<b>2 Weeks</b>	African American		3 Adults		No
Donna	41	<b>2 Years, 10 Months</b> (147.2 Weeks)	<b>2.5 Weeks</b>	African American		1 Minor		Intern
Emily	44	<b>1 Year, 8 Months</b> (86.5 Weeks)	<b>7 Years</b> (364.7 Weeks)	Hispanic; Other		1 Adult	2 Adults	No
Emma	51	<b>2.5 Years</b> (130.3 Weeks)	<b>4 Years</b> (208.4 Weeks)	Hispanic; Other		2 Adults		No
Francesca	49	<b>2 Years</b> (104.2 Weeks)	<b>11 Years</b> (573.1 Weeks)	African American; Hispanic; Other		1 Adult		Yes
Henrietta	62	<b>10 Months</b> (43 Weeks)	<b>6 Years</b> (312.6 Weeks)	African American		3 Adults		No
Jesenia	26	<b>66 Days</b> (9.4 Weeks)	<b>1 Year, 4 Months</b> (69.3 Weeks)	Hispanic; Other			1 Minor	No
Josefina	42	<b>88 Days</b> (12.6 Weeks)	<b>10 Weeks</b>	Hispanic	1 Adult	2 Adults	2 Minors	Yes
Karen	49	<b>32 Days</b> (4.6 Weeks)	<b>10 Weeks</b>	African American		2 Adults		Yes

<b>Kerry-Ann</b>	42	<b>2 Years, 6 Months</b> (130 Weeks)	<b>10 Years, 5 Months</b> (542.5 Weeks)	West Indian	2 1Adult; 1Minor			Yes
<b>Latoya</b>	57	<b>13 Months</b> (55.9 Weeks)	<b>4 Years, 4 Months</b> (225.6 Weeks)	Unknown	2 1Adult; 1Minor			No
<b>Laura</b>	58	<b>2 Years</b> (104.2 Weeks)	<b>3 Years, 3 Months</b> (169.2 Weeks)	Hispanic; Other			1 Adult	Yes
<b>Lucinda</b>	59	<b>2 Years</b> (104.2 Weeks)	<b>4 Years</b> (208.4 Weeks)	African American		3 Adults		No
<b>Lucy</b>	43	<b>30 Days</b> (4.2 Weeks)	<b>16 Years</b> (833.6 Weeks)	African American; Hispanic	2 1Adult; 1Minor	2 Adults		No
<b>Madison</b>	25	<b>4 Years</b> (208.4 Weeks)	<b>1 Year, 4 Months</b> (69.3 Weeks)	African American	2 Minors			Intern
<b>Makayla</b>	28	<b>1 Year, 10 Months</b> (95.1 Weeks)	<b>2 Years</b> (104.2 Weeks)	African American	1 Minor			No
<b>Marcia</b>	38	<b>40 Days</b> (5.7 Weeks)	<b>1 Year, 4 Months</b> (69.3 Weeks)	Hispanic; Other		4 Minors		No
<b>Marie</b>	43	<b>11 Months</b> (47.3 Weeks)	<b>7 Months</b> (30.1 Weeks)	West Indian		1 Minor		No
<b>Natalie</b>	31	<b>7 Months</b> (30.1 Weeks)	<b>6.5 Months</b> (28 Weeks)	African American		3 Minors		No
<b>Odessa</b>	32	<b>6 Months</b> (25.8 Weeks)	<b>11 Years</b> (573.1 Weeks)	Hispanic; West Indian; Other		1 Minor		Yes
<b>Onika</b>	44	<b>5 Years</b> (260.5 Weeks)	<b>4 Years</b> (208.4 Weeks)	African American; West Indian	1 Adult	1 Adult	1 Adult	Yes
<b>Paloma</b>	37	<b>2 Years 9 Months</b> (142.9 Weeks)	<b>5 Years</b> (260.5 Weeks)	Hispanic	1 Minor	2 1Adult; 1Minor	7 Minors	No
<b>Priscilla</b>	42	<b>1 Year</b> (52.1 Weeks)	<b>5 Years</b> (260.5 Weeks)	Hispanic	2 Minors	1 Adult		Intern
<b>Qiana</b>	24	<b>1 Year</b> (52.1 Weeks)	<b>2.5 Weeks</b>	African American; Hispanic; Other		1 Minor		Yes



<b>Rashida</b>	54	<b>40 Days</b> (5.7 Weeks)	<b>1 Year, 3 Months</b> (65 Weeks)	African American; West Indian		3 <i>Adults</i>		Intern
<b>Regina</b>	38	<b>8 Weeks</b>	<b>4 Weeks</b>	African American		5 <i>3Adults; 2Minors</i>		No
<b>Shanise</b>	56	<b>2 Years</b> (104.2 Weeks)	<b>1 Year, 10 Months</b> (95.1 Weeks)	African American		1 <i>Adult</i>		No
<b>Tia</b>	34	<b>8 Months</b> (34.4 Weeks)	<b>2 Months</b> (8.6 Weeks)	West Indian		4 <i>Minors</i>		No
<b>Valerie</b>	45	<b>7 Days</b> (1 Week)	<b>1.5 Weeks</b>	African American; Other		2 <i>1Adult; 1Minor</i>	2 <i>Adults</i>	No
<b>Vanessa</b>	25	<b>3 Months</b> (12.9 Weeks)	<b>2 Years, 2 Months</b> (112.8 Weeks)	Hispanic; West Indian	1 <i>Minor</i>			No
<b>Vera</b>	45	<b>8 Months</b> (34.4. Weeks)	<b>6 Months</b> (25.8 Weeks)	African American; West Indian	1 <i>Adult</i>	1 <i>Adult</i>		No
<b>Wyndolyn</b>	48	<b>3 Months</b> (12.9 Weeks)	<b>2 Weeks</b>	African American		2 <i>Adults</i>	1 <i>Adult</i>	No
<b>Yvette</b>	45	<b>4 Months</b> (17.2 Weeks)	<b>11 Months</b> (47.3 Weeks)	African American		3 <i>2Adults; 1Minor</i>		No
<i>M: 43    M: 1 Year, 3 Months    M: 3 Years, 4 Months</i>								

### Profile of Participants

In total, 37 formerly incarcerated mothers were interviewed. Their average age was 43 years old, with a range from 24 to 63. Most of the women lived in the borough of Queens (N = 13) followed by Manhattan (N = 10), Brooklyn (N = 9) and the Bronx (N = 4), with one woman (N = 1) who was homeless and awaiting a shelter placement at the time of her interview.

21 identified with an African American background, 15 identified with a Hispanic background,<sup>8</sup> 8 identified with a West Indian background,<sup>9</sup> and 1 participant identified as Black but could not describe an ethnicity in which she identified. Given high chances of interethnic relations in a diverse city like New York City, I expected that some participants would identify with more than one ethnicity. While some identified with only one ethnic background, others described themselves as ethnically-mixed. Table 1 describes the ethnic backgrounds of each participant, whether they identified with solely one ethnicity or identified with multiple.

On average, study participants had between 2 and 3 biological children, with a range of 1 to 10 children. The 37 mothers had a total of 101 children amongst them, with an average age of approximately 19 years old.<sup>10</sup> The youngest child of a study participant was 3 months old, while the oldest was a 44-year-old son.

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<sup>8</sup> The Spanish-speaking countries and U.S. territories represented among these participants include the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Spain, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Cuba.

<sup>9</sup> Represented West Indian countries include Jamaica, Haiti, Barbados, St. Croix, and Trinidad.

<sup>10</sup> In addition, one study participant – Paloma – had 7 children who had been adopted and whose ages she was not sure of, but who were all minors.

Of the 37 participants, 9 of the mothers (24%) did not have contact with a child. Of them, 7 did not have contact with at least one of their multiple children and 2 did not have contact with their only child. Thus, there were no mothers with multiple children who lacked communication with them all. It was also more common to lack communication with adult children than with minor children under 18 years old (6 and 3, respectively). Overall, 13 of the 37 mothers (35%) lived with at least one of their children. Of those residing with their children, 6 lived with under-aged children, 3 lived with adult children, and 4 lived with both under-aged and adult children. It was most common, however, for the mothers to maintain some form of contact with their children without physically residing with them. As shown in Table 1, a large majority of the participants ( $N = 29$ ; 78%) did not live with at least one of their children but maintained some form of contact. This may be expected of mothers with adult children given the social expectations that children's transition into adulthood is accompanied by the transition out of parents' home. While it is true that a majority of them did not live with their adult children but maintained communication ( $N = 21$ ; 84%), some of the mothers with adult children did live with them ( $N = 7$ ; 28%). The living arrangements were a bit more complex for mothers of under-aged children. Specifically, of the 23 mothers with minor children, 9 lived with *all* of their minor children while 11 did not live with *any* of their minor children but maintained communication. Thus, for mothers with children under 18 years old, there was a more equal chance of living with them or not living with them but maintaining contact. See Table 1 for descriptive information on all participants.

Of the 37 study participants, 43% ( $N = 16$ ) had pled guilty or been convicted of only one offense, excluding technical violations. Drug crimes – the possession or sale of

controlled substances – were the most common crimes for which they were incarcerated. This was followed by incarceration for economic crimes like identity theft, shoplifting, burglary, and grand larceny. Other crimes included prostitution, assault, weapons possession, and driving under the influence. On average, study participants' last bout of incarceration ranged from a period of 7 days to as long as 5 years, with an average period of latest incarceration of 1 year and 3 months.

Although I did not strategically recruit mothers at particular points in their reentry, the simultaneous recruitment through non-profit organizations, widely distributed flyers, and word of mouth meant that I interviewed women with varying time frames since their release. This ranged from as little as 1.5 weeks to as long as 16 years, with an average of approximately 3 years and 4 months after the last incarceration. In all, 14 mothers were interviewed within a year after their last incarceration; an additional 9 were interviewed between one to three years post-incarceration; 7 were interviewed within three to five years after incarceration; and 7 had spent over 5 years in society since their last period of incarceration.

### **Data Analysis**

The 37 in-depth interviews were analyzed using grounded theory techniques – an exploratory, inductive approach to theory development that emerges from the data. Grounded theory entails analysis that begins early in the research study and aids in further data collection to expand on emerging themes (Charmaz, 2006; Suddaby, 2006). This particular approach was adopted for this study to ensure that the conclusions presented in this dissertation are grounded in the participant's narratives and so that I could best capture the range and nuance of Hispanic, African American and West Indian

mothers' experiences with motherhood post-incarceration. Compared to other data analysis strategies, grounded theory techniques were particularly useful for my study in understanding the participants' realities and in discovering thematic patterns across cases (see Lal et al., 2012; Suddaby, 2006). Overall, grounded theory techniques allowed for a deeper understanding of heterogeneity among formerly incarcerated mothers regarding the salience of maternal identities and the influence of navigating motherhood on post-incarceration reintegration.

In order to uncover findings that were grounded in the data, I meticulously engaged in initial line-by-line coding. Interviews were initially coded into broad preliminary codes including, for example, "Race and Ethnicity" with any direct discussions of race or ethnicity as it relates to personal or vicarious experiences noted as such, "Mothers and Motherhood" vis-à-vis interpretations of mothering with parallels and contrasts with other groups, as well as "Aspects of Living," which included eight components:

1. Addiction & Recovery (Drugs, Alcohol, and Money)
2. Childrearing Practices and Parenting During Reentry
3. Custody and Living Arrangements of Children
4. Education
5. Employment (and Funds)
6. Family Relations (Non-Children)
7. Housing and Living Arrangements of Mothers
8. Intimate Partners

Subsequent focused coding was then conducted of all available data within these broader

areas, and where there were overlaps across coding categories these materials were included in each relevant area. I gave special attention to repetitions within and across the interviews as indicative of thematic patterns (see Ryan & Bernard, 2003), a technique also described as the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965). Using this approach, I further refined initial codes. For instance, “Mothers and Motherhood” was refined into more conceptual themes regarding mothers’ experiences in relation to non-mothers and fathers, notions of “bad” versus “good” mothers, and the construction of fictive mothers for the participants – to name a few. In addition, “Race and Ethnicity” was further refined into more conceptual themes regarding the family and ethnic responses to incarceration as well as drugs and family responses to drugs. As described in the above section on Sampling Strategy, mothers without contact with their children focused on the children with whom they held contact (or could potentially develop contact) and emphasized narratives around the ‘good times’ in those mother-child relationships. Given that they emphasized relationships with children with whom they remained in contact and avoided discussions of other children, it became apparent that I needed to be more direct in probing about those children with whom they did not have communication. For instance, I asked additional questions about the previous circumstances shaping their lack of communication, asked if they believed these relationships would ever change in the future, and asked them to compare their children’s experiences particularly when the mother-child relationships and communication between multiple children differed. Thus, I was able to explore mothers’ lack of contact more systematically in subsequent interviews. In addition to this, my data analysis not only examined experiences that were discussed directly, but also gave special attention to the lack of discussion regarding

particular mother-child relationships.

While this study began with a purposive sampling approach to obtain initial participants, recruitment continued with a more specified theoretical sampling approach that “directs you where to go” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 100). As described above in the section on Sampling Strategy, I found that a group worthy of further sampling was mothers with experiences in the shelter system. Seven initial interviews were with formerly incarcerated mothers who described unfortunate experiences in the shelter system and its impact on their navigation of motherhood. Thus, within the larger code of “Housing and Living Arrangements of Mothers,” the role of the shelter system in navigating motherhood became a refined theme. Though placement in the shelter system was intended to help the women gain stability in their reintegration, this living arrangement was unfavorable for mother-child relationships and appeared to shape subsequent reentry efforts by way of maternal housing interests. This arose unexpectedly in early interviews and drove me to engage in theoretical sampling to expand upon this initial analysis and obtain a better understanding of this emerging issue. This back and forth approach was beneficial in capturing the realities of post-incarceration motherhood concerning the shelter system, which will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

Due to the large scope of this dissertation, I did a third round of further coding while writing each findings chapter. This round of coding was instrumental in the comparative analyses as I examined narratives with special attention to varying characteristics like racial-ethnic background and degree of contact, including other relevant information like children’s ages. During this stage of analysis, I also accounted for deviant cases within prevalent themes. All together, through my data analysis

strategies, I discovered themes grounded in participants' narratives and within the comparative components embedded into this study, while also accounting for potentially deviant cases and obtaining a better understanding of the conditions in which this deviation occurs. For instance, the majority of the study participants (84%) believed women with children and women without children differed from each other in their experiences during and after incarceration. I took a closer look at the five participants who discussed similarities between these two groups. Though these five participants varied in age, racial-ethnic background and the ages of their children, they all maintained contact with their children but did not live with them at the time of their interview. In addition, by accounting for these deviant cases, I found that the five study participants believed women with children and women without children shared similar experiences due to concerns for others like family members and intimate partners.

I used NVivo 10 software during all data analysis. Even though this software includes a word search feature, this is not a feature I used for data analysis. Not only does counting words contradict the very fundamental aspect of grounded theory (Suddaby, 2006), but I believe this approach to analyzing data is too far-removed from narratives, which would have limited my understanding of the contexts in which words are used, and missed conceptually relevant discussions not captured by the use of specific terms. Instead, I specifically used this software to help manage my data, given that there were a number of comparative analyses embedded in the research design, including both those comparisons that were part of the study design (across racial-ethnic groups and amount of contact with children) and those that emerged in the analysis (for example, adult versus underage children, children placed with family versus foster care, etc.). The NVivo 10



software was used as an organizational tool for coding by helping me organize the data into major themes then subthemes, with logs of the number of references made and by whom, and also with links to field notes for each of the interviews. In this way, the software helped me keep track of the nuances found in my data (see Bringer et al., 2006; Hutchison et al., 2010; Lee & Fielding, 1991).

### **Research Limitations**

While it is true that this study was designed to purposively recruit a comparative number of formerly incarcerated women across racial-ethnic groups, the final sample has a disproportionately lower number of West Indians relative to Hispanic and African American participants. Such recruitment issues are common data collection problems in qualitative research, but, as I found during recruitment efforts, this may also speak to the particular stigma of incarceration within the West Indian community. Through my attempts to recruit a larger number of West Indian participants, I managed to recruit a few additional participants and receive input from third parties about this specific population in the criminal justice system. Initial interviews and informal discussions with West Indian colleagues and members of non-profit organizations sparked discussions of cultural values and familial disengagement from those contradicting cultural norms through criminal justice involvement and drug use. This sparked emerging theories from initial interviews regarding a limited family support network among formerly incarcerated West Indian women. I also began to expect difficulties to recruit a comparative number of formerly incarcerated women of West Indian background given the stigma of incarceration seemingly unique to this group of women. In fact, the differences amongst the West Indian population relative to the other groups in my sample

may explain their low participation. Yet, despite the lower number of interviews with participants of West Indian background, these interviews are rich in narrative and have import in exploring the racial-ethnic nuances within post-incarceration reintegration, which will be discussed in greater depth within subsequent findings chapters.<sup>11</sup>

Given my focus on the mothers' ethnic backgrounds, the extent of mixed ethnic identities should be addressed. To some degree, the number of ethnically mixed mothers made it challenging to parse out ethnic differences amongst the women, as it is difficult to compare experiences between women who identify with solely one ethnic background and women who identify with more than one. Scholars like Mary Waters have written about the challenges associated with measuring race and ethnicity given high immigration rates and interethnic relations (see Waters, 2000). Despite research challenges concerning interethnic identifications, scholars must continue to research racial and ethnic groups in order to examine and highlight inequalities or risks they encounter in society (Waters, 2000, p. 1737). In the current research study, I contribute to existing research by going beyond the mere *measurement* of racial/ethnic identities and, instead, I draw from individuals' narratives to qualitatively explore the role of ethnicity in their experiences. Despite identifying with more than one ethnicity, participants often described a particular "side" with which they identified more or had more familial interactions. This allowed for a better understanding of their experiences, particularly as it related to cultural ideals and familial assistance. More importantly, when the mothers discussed an experience that was specifically associated with their ethnicity or the

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<sup>11</sup> See Chapters Five and Six for discussions of cultural ideals amongst the West Indian population and the detached familial responses to the West Indian study participants who contradicted these ideals.

ethnicity of others, the specific ethnic association was often identified. For instance, Jesenia's father was Hispanic and her mother was White. Born in Puerto Rico and mostly raised in New York City, Jesenia did not consider herself mixed or White but referred to herself "a Hispanic mother." These explicit accounts were crucial in exploring the role of ethnicity in the experiences of ethnicity mixed mothers and permitted for discussions of this throughout the following findings chapters.

In addition, some scholars may argue that it is best to have participants with shorter periods of incarceration as well as longer periods of incarceration.<sup>12</sup> For instance, according to Barnes and Stringer (2014, p. 16), the period of incarceration may influence the salience of a maternal identity for incarcerated mothers:

[M]others with longer terms actually appeared to consider their mother identities *more important* than women with shorter sentences. Given that these women will be separated from their children for longer periods of time, maintenance of the mothering role may require that it be invoked often and intensely if it is to be maintained at all. Though we cannot be sure, this may be the effect of making the identity more salient.

Among the women in my sample, there was variation in the length of their last incarceration, from as little as 7 days to as long as 5 years. Even though my study did not include women with longer periods of incarceration exceeding 5 years, my analysis showed that length of incarceration did not arise within the women's narratives as something that drastically shaped their experiences as mothers. Instead, mothers frequently touched upon the number of times they had bouts of incarceration and the

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<sup>12</sup> This may also be conflated with time since release. Specifically, some scholars argue that it is best to have recently released participants as well as participants with more time since their last incarceration given that reentry obstacles may vary based on the amount of time post-incarceration (see Durose et al., 2014). Though it was not an intentional part of my study design, I recruited study participants with a wide range of time since their last incarceration, from as short as 1.5 weeks to as long as 16 years since their release (for an in-depth breakdown, see the Profile of Participants section above).

influence of multiple incarcerations on mother-child relationships. Given that I was able to capture such variations in my sample, I did not believe it was necessary to further sample women who had experienced longer sentences.

### **Intellectual Merit of the Research**

This research contributes to current knowledge in at least three distinct ways. First, I further sociological discussions on motherhood by unpacking motherhood identities and experiences post-imprisonment among racial-ethnic minority groups that are often treated collectively as “minorities” without attention to racial-ethnic variation. As noted by Arendell (2000, p. 1202): “We need more attention to the lives of particular mothers – to mothers’ own voices – and to the lives and voices of diverse groups of mothers [to] secure far more realistic and less normative portrayals of mothers’ lives than those afforded by sweeping images.” Despite social and cultural distinctions that may be present in meanings, expectations and experiences of motherhood, racial-ethnic minority women are often analyzed as a homogenous group. Second, mothers may vary in the amount of contact with their children but such variations are often overlooked. Thus, the research attempts to fill these gaps as I comparatively investigate the experiences of African American, West Indian, and Hispanic mothers with varying degrees of mother-child contact to better understand how minority women differ in their meanings and enactment of maternal identities.

Third, this study also advances criminological knowledge on the influences of post-incarceration motherhood for the reentry of formerly incarcerated mothers. Research on formerly incarcerated mothers often evaluates mothering *during* maternal incarceration and the general *effect* of maternal incarceration on mothers and the children

left behind (see Enos, 1998; Jensen & DuDeck-Biondo, 2005; Turney & Wildeman, 2015; Wildeman & Turney, 2014). This study expands upon this as it asks: (a) how and to what extent do women's identities as mothers impact their desires, decisions and behaviors after their release from imprisonment and (b) how does the post-incarceration navigation of motherhood for African American, West Indian, and Hispanic women influence various aspects of their reintegration post-incarceration. Grounded theory was useful for my study, allowing the data to develop into theories about how the formerly incarcerated mothers interpreted their own realities about navigating motherhood and reintegration post-incarceration.

Overall, my study explores *post-incarceration motherhood* and does so comparatively among racial-ethnic minority mothers who have varying levels of contact with their children, while also studying how the navigation of motherhood post-incarceration shapes mothers' reentry process.

## CHAPTER 4

### MATERNAL VALUES AND ACTIONS, AND THE FLUIDITY OF THE GAP IN BETWEEN

“It’s always been a very demanding job,” said Vanessa about motherhood. She was a 25-year-old mother who lived in a shelter with her domestic partner and only child. “I’m just 5!,” intercepted her 5-year-old daughter, who was playing nearby while I spoke with her mother. Though Vanessa believed motherhood in and of itself was a very demanding job, she cherished her maternal role. “I mean, sometimes it’s overwhelming. Sometimes it gets there...but it’s nothing that I’d give up.” Approximately two years before we spoke, she was released from incarceration for an assault charge against someone who mistreated her daughter while babysitting. She believed her actions were justified as a mother in protecting her daughter, believing “it was all for her.” According to Vanessa, mothers are expected to care for their children and good mothers “prioritize,” putting their children’s interest before their own. Some may argue that this understanding of “good mothers” is no different from dominant narratives among other groups of women. Yet, in Vanessa’s case, this protection of her daughter likely influenced her incarceration. Still, she found herself missing her daughter during her incarceration and not wanting to be away from her again. Thus, despite the demanding nature of motherhood, it was motherhood and the desire to stay with her daughter that motivated her actions post-incarceration. “I never let her out of my sight. Like, literally every day since [my release], I haven’t gotten rid of her....I’m doing what I gotta do.”

Narratives like Vanessa’s are lost when research on mass incarceration disproportionately evaluates the effect of incarceration on women’s children, both during

and after terms of imprisonment (see Cho, 2009; Dallaire et al., 2010; Geller et al., 2009; Hagan & Foster, 2012; Hissel 2014; Siegel, 2011; Turney & Wildeman, 2015; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013; Wildeman & Turney, 2014). As described in Chapter One, much of this research examines the wellbeing of children with incarcerated mothers as it relates to perceived academic performance and preparedness, residential (in)stability, and behavioral issues. Yet, relative to the existing literature on children with incarcerated mothers, less is known about how mothers attend to parenting after incarceration and during the reentry process. For instance, what do formerly incarcerated mothers deem as “good” mothering? Are there particular childrearing practices used during post-incarceration motherhood? What does mothering look like for formerly incarcerated women living apart from their children, without custody of their children, or without communication with their children? What are the similarities and differences in the childrearing patterns of formerly incarcerated mothers from distinct racial-ethnic backgrounds? The purpose of this chapter is to answer these questions.

### **Mothers versus Non-Mothers**

Of the 37 participants in my study, only five thought mothers and non-mothers had similar experiences during their incarceration or upon their release. These five women varied in age, racial-ethnic background and the ages of their children, but all five maintained communication with their children despite living separately from them. Overall, they believed similar experiences were largely due to the presence of loved ones like family members (including parents, nieces, nephews, and godchildren) as well as intimate partners. In contrast, a majority of the participants (31 of 37; 84%) believed their experiences during or after incarceration drastically differed from those of women who

did not have children.<sup>1</sup> In some cases, the participants also compared their own experiences before and after becoming mothers. It is important to note that even though I can not speak to the truthfulness of their perceptions about non-mothers, the mothers' perceptions are of interest as I investigate their accounts and how they understand their experiences.

### **During Incarceration**

The vast majority of study participants believed that being mothers introduced concern and worry during their incarcerations that were seemingly more severe than the stresses faced by women without children. This is captured here by Bernadette, Bianca and Priscilla, respectively:

A woman that's not a mother don't have no problems. She could do her time without worrying about anything.... [A] woman who's not a mother, she don't got nothing to worry about. She don't got no kids or nothing. She just scot-free. Me, on the other hand, I'm worried about what they doing, how they doing. It's a lot of difference.

[I]t's different because they don't have any kids out here to worry about, which is probably a good thing 'cause then you don't have to worry about the situation—what situation your kid is in. You don't have to worry about picking up the phone or hearing, "Oh, you know, I'm having a hard time with the kids" or whatever. You know, you don't have to worry about: you left responsibility out here and you're wondering how it's going to work itself out.

You always constantly thinking about that child, especially being incarcerated because when you incarcerated you have nothing else to do but to think about you and the harm you've done to others and your children. If you don't have children when you incarcerated, all you think about is you and all you have to worry about is you.

The above accounts demonstrate how the women saw motherhood. Specifically, they described non-mothers as women who only thought about themselves and not others, but mothers were described as being concerned not only with the harm done to their children

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<sup>1</sup> One woman was unable to compare or contrast women with children and women without children.



but also to “others.” This alludes to the notion that motherhood tends to make women more other-oriented, even during incarceration, which was an understanding that spanned across race/ethnicity, the degree of contact with children, and mothers with adult and minor children.

Reflecting back on their time in jail or prison, the mothers described questions and concerns during incarceration about the circumstances that awaited them upon their release. As Jesenia stated, these questions include: “Okay, what’s my child gonna think of me when I come out? Is she gonna isolate from me? Is he gonna hate me because I got locked up? Is he gonna resent me because I did a crime? Is he gonna push away from me and closer to the father?” Such concerns were believed to interfere with the wellbeing of incarcerated mothers, who were “constantly worrying” and “couldn’t focus on themselves.” For instance, as Marie explained: “the problem is that sometimes as an incarcerated mother you can get so caught up in what you didn’t do or what you have to do or the mistakes you made that you can lock into self-pity and depression and end up setting yourself up for failure all over again.” In addition, Kerry-Ann believed that in comparison to other incarcerated women, it was more difficult for incarcerated mothers to deal with the pre-incarceration difficulties that landed them in jail or prison because they were more likely than non-mothers to be “worried about what’s happening on the outside.”

Even though Emily was the primary caregiver for her oldest son, her daughter and youngest son were raised by their paternal grandparents, which she believed caused her incarceration to have a differential impact amongst her children:

[T]hat’s what bothered me the most: thinking about my [older] son. It didn’t really bother my other two because I didn’t really raise them, but my son was with me 24/7.

So when I went away, it was hard for him and I knew it was hard for him. It was hard for me. So, it was the biggest depression that I went through.

Even though Emily described mother-child relationships that varied between her three children, she still believed children were “something to look forward to” upon mothers’ release from incarceration. Yet, her older son, who was like a “friend,” served as a greater source of motivation compared to her other two children. Thus, while maternal identities were largely believed to introduce stresses during incarceration, maternal relationships also served as a motivating factor for mothers to bear their incarceration, particularly when they had minor children. For instance, Francesca believed the only thing that pulled her through her incarceration and the only thing she lived for was her son who was approximately seven years old at the time:

I told all [these incarcerated] women – 60 women: “Take my name, you can give me a number, you can take away my belongings. But one thing you can’t take away from me is my word. And as far as I’m concerned, the only thing that’s pulling me through and I live for – as I let my life on hold – I’m coming home to my child.” To me, my child is everything.

So, for her, having her son’s picture and knowing that she would be released to her son were both helpful in enduring the two-year incarceration. During Ana’s first incarceration, her unborn daughter “was the only thing that kept my spirits up, kept me looking forward to something. She was the only thing that made me realize that I do have a future.” It is important to note, however, that while mothers discussed their children and maternal relationships as incentives to bear their incarcerations, these discussions were more prevalent when discussing their sources of motivation post-incarceration.

### **After Incarceration**

Maternal responsibilities and concerns about children were often described (both directly and indirectly) as the distinguishing factor that shaped the reentry experiences of

mothers as compared to non-mothers. This was consistent across racial-ethnic background and was also the same for women whether they had minor children or adult children. When mothers did not have contact with their only child, however, there was no mention of maternal responsibilities or concerns that distinguished mothers from non-mothers in their reentry. The distinguishing factor of maternal responsibilities was only noted when mothers had contact with either their only child or with at least one of their multiple children.

As Emily explained: “when a mother comes out of jail, they have something to look forward to, you know, something there waiting for them....They have something to take care of.” Latoya elaborated on this: “We have to think about, as a mother, like, clothing ourselves *and* our children. A single person’s just gotta worry about themselves with everything.” In addition to these maternal responsibilities regarding children, the participants believed formerly incarcerated mothers were faced with more concerns due to the “wreckage” of incarceration and, as a result, “a mother might be more cautious after with going back in.” According to Dolores, upon their release, “women that have children have to be more preservative. We have to be more supportive towards their kids. People that don't have kids don't have to worry about that.”

Accordingly, the study participants believed these responsibilities and concerns regarding children seemingly distinguished mothers’ reentry experiences from the reentry experiences of other women without children. Natalie believed that, compared to those who are mothers in reentry, “the ones who are not moms, they priorities be different.” Priscilla also believed that post-incarceration experiences in reentry for mothers and non-mothers were “totally different.” She elaborated:

A person that's coming out that doesn't have kids, they would have to just worry about how they get back on their feet. A mother, on the contrary, has to worry [about]: how to get back on her feet to be there for her children, to reunite with her children, to provide for her children. So, it's an enormous, long list of what she wants to do compared to a person who's just within themselves that doesn't have kids.

Priscilla's account highlights the role of wanting to "be there" and provide for children as further motive for mothers to reintegrate compared to non-mothers. Carolina was another mother who believed mothers' experiences in reentry were "totally different" from the experiences of those women who "don't have other responsibility as far as children." She compared her post-incarceration experiences before she became a mother with her most recent post-incarceration experience as a mother in reentry. After a previous incarceration, prior to having children, she described herself as having "no worries in the world" and not caring about anything in particular upon her release. Yet, after being incarcerated as a mother and "leaving the kids behind," her perspective changed as she described herself as driven to prevent re-incarceration in order to uphold her maternal responsibilities to her children.

Though being mothers was described as a greater source of motivation upon their release from incarceration, participants also believed that maternal responsibilities introduced an array of obstacles during their reentry that were unique to formerly incarcerated mothers. As Vanessa described, formerly incarcerated mothers are not only tasked with trying to "get back in touch with what's going on on the outside" but they must also "get back on track with your children." According to Ana:

[W]hen you don't have children, I think it's a lot easier because...you don't have to worry about feeding, making sure there's food on the table for those kids. You're only worrying about yourself. I think it's a lot easier when you don't have children. I wouldn't trade it, but I feel it's a lot easier.

Ana's description of the maternal responsibilities that introduce additional reentry

obstacles for mothers included behaviors that are typically performed while residing with children, which she was doing at the time of her interview. Yet, mothers who were not living with their children post-incarceration also distinguished themselves from non-mothers as they discussed concerns to enact maternal responsibilities. As Marie explained:

The woman who comes out who has children has to worry about getting her children back, being able to provide for herself and her children, [and] being able to be independent while still providing for those children. Whereas a woman who comes home who has no children: yes, it's difficult but she has no one to worry about but her. She has no one to prepare for but her. It's hard enough trying to get your life together not only for yourself, but for 1, 2, 3, 4, whatever kind of kids you got.

According to the participants' accounts, formerly incarcerated women *without* children were "free" with "nothing to worry about" and, in essence, faced less difficulty transitioning back into society compared to formerly incarcerated mothers who perceivably held more responsibilities and faced additional demands upon their release. Given that formerly incarcerated mothers believed they encountered additional obstacles due to maternal responsibilities and desires, but these desires also encouraged their reintegration, this requires an understanding of the maternal ideals they essentially hoped to achieve.

### **Who are "Good" Mothers?**

Consistent across racial-ethnic background, continuum of contact and the age of their children, good mothers were most commonly described as mothers who were "always there" for their children by providing them with unconditional love, putting their children's concerns before their own interests, and being available to listen, talk to, and advise their children during times of need. Common descriptions of a good mother entailed "being there for your child no matter what it is that they've done" and in spite of

“what you want to do.” These descriptions were directly and indirectly associated with the unconditional nature of good mothering since the perceived actions of good mothers were not altered by either the children’s problem behaviors or the mothers’ personal interests. Another common description of good mothers was the following, as said by Dolores:

Good moms is always there... always there to answer questions and give answers... ask questions, give answers or, you know, just listen and then comment. Comment on their lifestyle and which way they should go. To give my true opinion.

This notion of “being there,” however, did not necessarily require a physical presence at all times but, instead, entailed a larger understanding that the mothers may be physically, verbally, or emotionally available to the children. Given the physical distance during incarceration and the complexity of the mothers’ situations post-incarceration, it is no surprise that maternal ideals were not limited to a constant physical presence but also consisted of the women hoping to give their children attention (broadly defined) and take care of maternal responsibilities in some way.

Thus, even though some of these accounts may coincide with normative constructions of motherhood like providing unconditional love, in the next section I discuss mothers’ narratives of maternal ideals beyond normative residential and custodial arrangements and, instead, as they relate to other maternal circumstances such as nonresidential mothering, noncustodial mothering, and mothering without contact.

### **Nonresidential and Noncustodial Mothering**

The understanding of good mothering was shaped by the post-incarceration circumstances in which the women enacted their maternal identities, including both nonresidential mothering and noncustodial mothering. Of the 37 participants, 23 had at least one under-aged child and, of them, half did not have custody. In addition, 29 of the

participants did not live with at least one of their children (of all ages) but maintained some form of contact. I found that despite these arrangements, such formerly incarcerated mothers emphasized meanings of motherhood that were associated with *practical* actions they performed. These emphases allowed the women to manage existing dissonance and maintain salient maternal identities in various situations.

For instance, Marcia was a mother of four children who were all under 18 at the time of her interview. She did not have custody or live with any of her children. Her oldest daughter (age 15) had been adopted, while her 12- and 9-year old sons were under their father's custody and her youngest daughter (age 6) was placed under a grandmother's custody. When asked to describe things she did as a mother, Marcia responded:

I'm very active in my kids' school shows, um, graduations, plays, birthdays, activities, when they call me for homework, when they need advice as a friend, for everything. I do all the stuff, all the stuff a real mom is supposed to do.

Thus, despite the nonresidential and noncustodial arrangements, she described still "being there" for her children. Her ability to perform these behaviors was extremely meaningful to her as a mother because according to her: "A good mom is the one that's there whether you're up, down, sideways, high." In fact, she considered herself a good mother based on the very emphasis on "being there" for her children, which she accomplished by being available to talk when needed and through her attendance at the important events in their lives. The prominence of her maternal identity was evident during Marcia's interview through the pride and joy she demonstrated as she discussed meeting the ideal behaviors she associated with her maternal identity. In fact, she wanted to use herself as an example

and teach other formerly incarcerated women how to be good mothers without custody of children.

It is important to note that some mothers maintained an understanding of good mothering that did not appear to be shaped by their incarcerations, but had likely formed based on circumstances that existed prior to incarceration. While the custodial and residential arrangements of some mothers changed as a result of their incarceration, other mothers engaged in noncustodial and/or nonresidential mothering well before incarceration. For instance, at the time of her interview, Natalie was a mother of three children – all under the age of 13 – who did not live with her but with whom she maintained contact. As a result of various challenges including residential instability and the incarceration of her intimate partner, Natalie’s eldest two children had experienced fluctuating custodial arrangements from a young age but lived with their father out of state at the time of Natalie’s interview. In addition, due to a positive test for cocaine, Natalie was unable to leave the hospital with her youngest daughter, who was taken into the foster care system and eventually adopted by her foster mom. Natalie’s description of what good mothering entailed was not limited to custodial rights or joint living arrangements, but generally consisted of being involved in the children’s lives and knowing where they were even when separated: “a good mom is somebody that know where they kids at all the time. No matter whether the kids with you or not, you still in they life.” In fact, Natalie described her actions in a way that were linked to her understanding of a good mother, confirming her involvement in her children’s lives despite the nonresidential and noncustodial arrangements. For instance, even though her eldest two children lived in a different state, Natalie described her current mothering



behaviors as communicating with her 12-year-old daughter and 11-year old son via Facebook. Even though a foster mother adopted her 4-year-old daughter, Natalie expressed performing mothering behaviors by visiting her daughter on the weekends to braid her hair and by calling her during the week to check on her whereabouts. Thus, despite her noncustodial and nonresidential circumstances, Natalie described being involved in her children's lives – actions that corresponded with her perception of maternal ideals.

Parenting post-incarceration was like a “trial and error” adjusting their behaviors to improve relationships with their children. This, for instance, was true for Marie. Prior to her incarceration, Marie lived with her son and her mother, who played a major role raising her son in the ten years prior to her interview. Even though Marie had shared custody with her mother, she was not living with her 13-year-old son during the seven months after her release; yet, she maintained direct contact with him. Initially upon her release, which was seven months before her interview, she took an authoritarian parenting approach. When her son stayed with her temporarily over the Summer school break, she was “really on him” about household responsibilities like cleaning his room, doing his laundry, and passing an inspection before receiving his allowance. Eventually, she realized that this parenting style “was not working” for her or her son who felt incompetent and smothered by her actions. Marie then made adjustments in her mothering behaviors, distancing from the authoritarian approach. For example, she began visiting her son on the weekends “just to spend some time together” given that he valued simply staying inside and watching movies with her. This new approach in her post-

incarceration nonresidential mothering focused more on quality time, which she believed allowed for better open communication with her teenage son.

As evident from these accounts of post-incarceration nonresidential and noncustodial mothering, maternal identities were still prominent in the women's lives. In particular, such formerly incarcerated mothers expressed a "love" and appreciation of their maternal relationships when they were able to enact behaviors that were meaningful in their quest to be good mothers. In some cases, the formerly incarcerated mothers emphasized particular meanings of motherhood when they were a practical reality in their reentry, which allowed the women to meet their maternal ideals and view themselves as good mothers.

### **Mothering Without Contact**

Of the 9 mothers without communication with a child, 7 did not have contact with at least one of their multiple children and 2 did not have contact with their only child. Among this group of formerly incarcerated women without contact, their narratives about good mothering behaviors were the most complex. First, these mothers at times simultaneously met their maternal ideals while also contradicting them. This was true for mothers who did not have contact with their only child as well as for mothers who did not have contact with at least one of their multiple children. At the time of her interview, four months had passed since Jesenia had any communication with her 5-year-old son, who lived with his father and paternal grandmother. Though Jesenia lost custody of her son, she was making efforts at self-development and going through formal procedures to regain custodial rights. She wanted to regain custody in order to fulfill maternal expectations as a positive role model since she believed it was her responsibility to raise

her son to be a respectful man. According to Jesenia: “A good mother is somebody that puts [the] child’s concerns – like their health, their wellbeing, the environment they’re in – first before anything.” This description allowed her to maintain a maternal identity that was salient in various everyday situations, including her efforts at anger management and recovery from substance use. Despite the lack of communication in the months prior to her interview, Jesenia also described enacting maternal behaviors from a distance by mailing her son clothes, food, and leisure items like toys and children’s books. Yet, she continued to note additional behaviors associated with good mothering that demanded at least some form of communication, which she did not have. For instance, according to her, a good mother is also responsible for “making sure he’s up to date on his shots and he’s getting the medical [check ups] that he needs. That he’s doing schooling. And...just being there for the job when the child needs assistance with homework and stuff like that.” Thus, in some ways she saw herself as meeting her maternal ideals of being a good mother but in other ways she was unable to fulfill the behaviors she associated with good mothering. She was able to manage this clear dissonance by describing early “mistakes” in her parenting and considering motherhood a learning process: “I’m still learning little by little the pros and cons of motherhood.”

Mothers without contact with their children often dissociated themselves from bad mothering by justifying their circumstances by framing themselves as good mothers overall. Bernadette was 63 years old at the time of her interview and was a mother of six. Of her six children, she did not have contact with two – her middle son and middle daughter – who were raised by their maternal grandmother. Even though Bernadette’s mother “stepped in” to help Bernadette raise these two children at a time when she could

not do so herself, not being there at a critical time in their lives contributed to Bernadette's ongoing lack of communication with her children, including at the time of her interview. Notably, however, Bernadette believed "a good mom stays with her kid and take care of it, and do the things they suppose to do as they grow." Although someone may argue that Bernadette's actions with her middle son and daughter do not coincide with her descriptions of a good mother (i.e., someone who stays with their children), Bernadette did not consider herself a bad mother. She was able to manage this dissonance by emphasizing her feelings that she "loved all of them" and by rationalizing her behaviors, believing the previous arrangements were necessary due to her addiction at the time. This rationalization demonstrates how some mothers were able to assert positive assessments of their maternal behaviors despite such circumstances, including not being in touch with some or all of their children.

When mothers did not have contact with at least one of their multiple children, the dynamic nature of good and bad mothering allowed them to compensate for maternal inadequacies as good mothers with those they had lost contact with by enacting maternal ideals with subsequent children. Like Bernadette, Paloma was the mother of multiple children and did not have contact with some of her children. Paloma, however, had ten children and she did not have any contact with the majority of her children – her seven children who had been adopted. In fact, when asked the ages of her children, she was unable to provide this information for these seven children. While speaking with Paloma, she described herself as being both a good mother and a bad mother: "I've been in both places. I've been a bad mom and I was a good mom." She believed her transition to being a good mother was possible by remaining in recovery from substance abuse because,

according to her, a drug addiction hinders the ability to “take care of your kid the way he’s supposed to be taken care of.” She believed a good mother was someone “taking care of responsibilities” such as having food available in the home. When asked specifically about her actions as a mother, Paloma only spoke of her youngest child, a 3-year-old son she had custody of and who she also lived with. In fact, she became emotional when describing her actions as a mother to her youngest son, giving a large smile when discussing their relationship. Her focus on the youngest child appeared to have a protective function in that she diverted attention away from her maternal disengagement with her older children and directed our discussion toward examples in which she was meeting maternal ideals, shaping her presentation of herself as doing a good job as a mother.

Like Paloma, at least two other mothers believed being “good” or “bad” at mothering was more dynamic, sometimes describing themselves as having been both good and bad mothers. For instance, as Emily explained, a “bad mother is something that I used to be.” According to Lucinda: “I wasn’t always the good mother, I wasn’t always the bad mother.” Though these women varied in racial-ethnic background and contact with their children, they each had a history of drug use. It is important to note, however, that this notion of having been both good and bad mothers was not common among the entire sample. This is likely due to the protective functions previously described that managed dissonance in meeting maternal ideals and the likelihood that mothers did not view themselves as bad in nature but as having made bad decisions. In fact, at least four mothers argued that there was no such thing as “bad” mothers. Instead, as Josefina argued: “I just don’t think there’s ‘bad mothers,’ I just think they make bad decisions and

sometimes you're just at the wrong place at the wrong time." Similarly, Henrietta noted, women are "not really bad mother[s]; it's what they do that's bad." Bianca explained: "I really don't think there's a good and a bad when it comes to being a mother. You're a mother and you're just trying to deal with that responsibility on its own." These narratives demonstrate how mothers were able to manage dissonance between how they viewed themselves as mothers and their mothering behaviors. Such mothers' circumstances and maternal experiences were so complex that the women believed their characters as individuals or mothers did not deserve to be judged negatively due to non-normative mothering arrangements, such as lack of custody or contact, but instead they deserved recognition for their maternal efforts – especially while in reentry.

### **The Transition to Post-Incarceration Mothering**

Across racial-ethnic background, and among mothers with contact to their children, study participants discussed restrictions they faced during their incarceration to mother to their full capacity, and the implications of these restrictions on mothering under-aged children upon their release. For instance, the disconnect between mothers' desires for their children and the habits their children acquired in their absence was often described as a challenge formerly incarcerated mothers faced upon their return. As explained by Makayla, who had an 11-year-old son: "it is a problem when you're reuniting with your child and they have one system and you have to give *your* system." When I asked Makayla to explain what she meant by her "system," she described needing to teach her under-aged son manners and establish rules that were not in place during her absence:

[M]y son was very come-home-from-outside-and-in-the-frig. I do not do *that*. It's no, you don't do that, you know. Certain things like, brushing his teeth before he goes to

bed. It was always wake up, brush your teeth. No, you have to brush your teeth before you go to bed too, you know....And you have to stay consistent on changing the rules back to how *you* want things as opposed to how they were before.

During Marie's incarceration, her adolescent son resided with his maternal grandmother. Marie had specifically explained to her son that when he wanted to engage in any leisure activities, he needed to ask for his grandmother's permission. According to Marie, her son eventually realized that his grandmother "was in control." Once released from prison, but no longer living with her son, Marie found herself disturbed when he continued to seek his grandmother's advice and permission instead of seeking it from her. Even though Marie had advised her son to take this approach while she was incarcerated, she felt as though she had lost some influence in her son's life post-incarceration. This took an emotional toll on her: "I felt some kind of way. It caused feelings in me." Enos (1998) described this experience as "losing place" with the child in that formerly incarcerated mothers sometimes have diminished involvement as caretakers and a weakened role in authority. Yet, Marie explained that, at the time of her interview, her son seeks her advice and "calls me like at a major crisis."

Madison's two children (ages 6 and 4) stayed with their maternal grandmother while she was incarcerated, but resided with her again after her prison release. She believed the hardest aspect of her reentry as a mother was "not having control over the past couple of years," since her limited influence during incarceration made it more difficult to be the mother she ideally hoped to be after incarceration. For instance, she did not believe that children should be allowed to rely on television in order to pass time in isolation, which is what they became accustomed to during her incarceration. Madison described working to correct this habit and trying to get her children acquainted with

what she believed were healthier routines. Rather than allowing them to watch television, she preferred shared activities with her children like coloring, painting or cooking together; but if they *did* engage in individual work, she tried to ensure that it entailed learning activities on their iPads. In addition to their dependence on television, Madison also believed that her children lacked structure while they lived with their grandmother. As a result, her children were exhibiting problematic behaviors because, according to her, “they like to be all over the place.” She believed her children’s behaviors upon her release were not reflective of her mothering and were not behaviors that she, as a mother, wanted her children to display:

All the effect that it had on your children is the hardest part for me. I felt like, “What the fuck? This is not how I want my children to be.” But I can’t be mad because I wasn’t around to mold them how I want them to be.

The disconnect between how Madison wanted her children to behave and how they behaved upon her release introduced additional obstacles in repairing the harms of incarceration, but also presented reentry goals in which she stressed her maternal role to facilitate positive development in her children. Post-incarceration, Madison tasked herself with teaching her two children that their previously learned behaviors were unacceptable while simultaneously giving them verbal positive reinforcements when they made constructive changes in their behavior. Though she found it difficult correcting her children’s problematic behaviors, Madison noted that the most rewarding moment as a mother since her release was being able to see the progress her children were making in their behavior and their education. To her, this was a sign that her children were “going to be fine” and that her maternal efforts were working – thus, reinforcing her maternal identity.



It is important to note that some children developed constructive behaviors during their mothers' incarceration, and yet there was still a potential for maternal conflict. For instance, Donna described making efforts to learn about her son who was 11 years old when she was incarcerated and 14 years old upon her release. With age and the support of his maternal uncle, who had temporary custody of him, Donna's son developed independence and gained some household responsibilities in her absence:

[B]efore I left, I was ironing his clothes, I was washing his clothes, *I* was taking out the garbage, *I* was washing the dishes. I come home, *he's* ironing his clothes, *he's* taking out the garbage, *he's* washing the dishes. So, you know, he really learned a lot from my brother and he became more independent through them.

While her son appeared to make efforts to show his mother how he had developed over the years, Donna experienced some conflict as she sought the little boy she was accustomed to pre-incarceration. By the time she returned from prison, her son had three birthdays without her, grew facial hair, began playing basketball, and developed a new interest in fashion and sneakers. Her son, who had behaved like a "small child" before she was incarcerated, had grown into a teenager who wanted to "be a man." As a result, there were numerous things she was still learning about her son, though it had been just two and half weeks after her release. Such maternal desire to learn about one's children post-incarceration is common among formerly incarcerated women and has also been demonstrated in existing criminological research (see Leverentz, 2014; Michalsen, 2010).

In addition to learning more about their children's growth upon their release, some formerly incarcerated mothers tried to overcompensate for the "time lost" during their incarceration by making attempts to "do everything." Yet, overcompensating did not resolve new or pre-existing issues and instead had the potential of introducing more parent-child conflict. As Kerry-Ann explained:

[Y]ou sort of want to come back out and make up for time lost, but you can't. So, that's hard. You sort of want to do everything and act like nothing happened....I'm thinking: "Too much time has gone already and I got to get things right and [my oldest son] gotta get things right"....You come out and you want to do *everything* and you're racing. It's like a race against time because you lost that time and you're trying to get it back but you can't get it back, so you shouldn't try to.

Instead of trying to make up for lost time by overcompensating after their incarceration, some women suggested that formerly incarcerated mothers take a softer approach reintegrating back into the community and into the family unit. For instance, Ana, who had an adult daughter and two under-aged sons, noted: "It has to be a transition. Little by little. Little by little. A little bit more. A little bit more." As Kerry-Ann acknowledged, because of her concentration on the time spent incarcerated, she was "moving full speed ahead" when she was initially released. But looking back after 10 years in reentry, she believed this had not been the best approach because she "didn't stop and think and analyze the situation." Instead, she suggested that other formerly incarcerated mothers "should just try to come out and see what's going on and see how you fit in." This passive approach, however, was equaled to a "trial and error" where "you sort of keeping failing and then you get it right after some time." In this way, formerly incarcerated mothers may encounter multiple setbacks prior to making progress in the maternal goals that often motivate reentry efforts.

### **The Next Generation of Children**

Of the 37 mothers in my study, over one-third were also grandmothers or expecting a grandchild at the time of their interview. For these women, maternal behaviors were not limited to their children but also applied to their grandchildren. For instance, when asked what they did as *mothers*, babysitting and taking care of grandchildren were noted and likely done in a maternal effort to help their children. It

was obvious throughout the interviews that grandchildren brought the women great pleasure. When describing the most pleasing moment as mothers since their release from incarceration, over a quarter of the grandmothers described becoming grandmothers, seeing and bonding with their grandchildren, as well as being able to “shape” their grandchildren and watch them grow up. In Vera’s case, the birth of her granddaughter was sufficient motivation to opt for an alternative residential drug program:

I was getting ready to go upstate and when I went upstate, I had to do four years minimum. So, and I was like “Shit!” Not that I couldn't do it, but I didn't want to. My daughter had just had my granddaughter and the only thing that hurt me: not the fact that I got caught, not the fact that I had to do time, but was not seeing my granddaughter grow up. So, I wanted to get back home as soon as possible. So, I opted for the program.

Thus, grandchildren not only provided pleasure when the formerly incarcerated women were involved in their lives, but they also motivated the women to make constructive changes and decisions in order to be involved.

Once the women had grandchildren, there appeared to be a shift in maternal focus that came in two ways. First, some grandmothers shifted their attention from their children to their grandchildren. At the time of her interview, Karen had two children: a 21-year-old son and a 20-year-old daughter. She noted that because her two children were older in age and presumably “grown,” she would remain available for her children but she was focusing her childrearing efforts on her grandson. Throughout Karen’s interview, she would cheerfully incorporate her grandson’s name when discussing her reentry progress and with a large smile, she would say things such as, “it’s about [my grandson] now. All about [my grandson].” Second, when women had multiple children, they sometimes purposefully focused their attention on their children who had bore

grandchildren. As Lucinda explained: “I love my children, but my focus is on my daughter because she has my grandson.”

By directing their attention to grandchildren, whether directly or through their parents, the participants managed dissonance within their own mothering behaviors. After facing inadequacies in meeting maternal ideals with their own children, grandchildren sometimes represented second chances. As such, relationships with grandchildren tended to be healthier. As Bernadette admitted, she “gets along” better with her grandchildren than her own daughters. Mothers with grandchildren tried to make up for lost times with their children by being actively involved in their grandchildren’s lives; yet, this was not always taken well by their own children. When asked the greatest challenge for her as a mother since her release, Wyndolyn believed it was that her daughters did not want to accept her opinions and advice concerning her grandsons. They would respond with remarks such as: “You wasn’t even here to raise us. How you gonna tell us how to raise our sons?” Such remarks made her feel bad as their mother. Thus, even though such women took great pleasure in having a role in their grandchildren’s lives, this involvement did not reconcile mother-child relationships that were still troubled – a reality for about a quarter of the formerly incarcerated mothers with grandchildren. Next I examine how mothers described their efforts to meet maternal ideals during their reentry, particularly in the face of troubled relationships with their children.

### **Mothering Through Troubled Relationships**

While “being there” was understood as a basic component of mothering, this was often fraught with emotional wounds that made it difficult for formerly incarcerated mothers to accomplish this goal upon their release. Consistent with literature on the

effects of maternal incarceration on children (see Leverentz, 2014; Siegel, 2011), the mothers I interviewed described their children as expressing feelings of abandonment, betrayal, and bitterness as a result of their mother's incarceration and behaviors leading to their incarceration such as drug addiction. When asked what made it harder to be a good mother after incarceration, Francesca, who had a 19-year-old son, responded:

[I]t's tough on a mother that went to jail because your kid – remember – feels abandoned, feels betrayed. And when you leave your child for an extended time and come back into your child's life, it's not gonna be easy to win him because he feels abandoned, he feels betrayed, he feels certain emotions that you put yourself into that situation and you gonna have to deal with it.

At times, the children's feelings were expressed through behaviors or remarks to their mothers, which contributed to the difficulties mothers faced in rebuilding relationships post-incarceration and “getting that bond back with your kid.” Even though the women understood that they had to “deal with” their children's emotions post-incarceration in order to rebuild mother-child relationships, it was difficult when they did not know how exactly they should address their children's feelings. This was true for Bernadette, a mother of six adult children:

You don't know where to begin at. You don't know what to do. And you don't know how to bond with a child if you just came out of jail because they have a resentment to[wards] you about being in jail.

Such uncertainties about the best approach to navigate motherhood post-incarceration presented some conflict, as it was difficult to address the disconnect between what formerly incarcerated mothers hoped for upon their release and what was occurring in reality.

Some mothers made suggestions about how to address their children's feelings to make it easier to be good mothers. While they noted it may have been easier to avoid

addressing their children's feelings, avoidance came with consequences. According to Marcia, who had four under-aged children: "If you don't start reaching out from the inside, when you come out it's gonna be harder because everything else – the devil dances around you 24/7." She believed it was essential that mothers communicated with their children during incarceration, or they would risk added stress attempting to rebuild maternal relationships while managing other reentry obstacles like finding work and housing. In order to "be there" for their children and be good mothers, many study participants felt that mothers needed to be understanding about the impact of their incarceration on their minor and adult children and give them time and space to heal from these effects. Emma, who had two adult children, accomplished this by being respectful of "boundaries" and "what they want," and not imposing her explanations. Emma explained: "She's entitled to her feelings, she's entitled to respect, she's entitled to be heard. She's not entitled to be forced to listen to what I've done." In reference to their children's feelings of resentment and anger regarding their incarceration, the mothers often expressed beliefs that their children would eventually "grow out of it" so they needed to be patient with their children while they made this transition. As Francesca explained: "They gonna grow up, they gotta understand, and by you talking to them – little by little. It takes time; Rome was not built in a day so don't expect the child to be loving you in one day. You was out of his life for whatever bout of time." Considering the time necessary for children to come to terms with the effects of maternal incarceration, the general consensus among the mothers was that "you can't rush them into nothing" and the mothers must, therefore, "take it one day at a time."

Despite these expectations that their children would “grow out” of these feelings with time and space, it was clear that adult children were expected to have already grown out of these feelings, particularly when the mothers did not have contact with these adult children. For instance, at the time of her interview, Wyndolyn was not speaking with her 28-year-old daughter. According to Wyndolyn, her daughter had a “real nasty ass disposition” in that she spoke to Wyndolyn in a disrespectful manner:

I told her that: “Regardless of how many times I go to jail or how many times I relapse or something like that, you’re gonna talk to me like I’m your mother. You’re not gonna disrespect me, you’re not gonna talk to me how you wanna talk to me”.... And my point was that it could be that she was still hurting....I don’t know, but I think that she should’ve been old enough to grow out of that by now.

At the time of her interview, Laura did not have contact with her 20-year-old daughter. When her daughter was graduating from high school at 18, Laura attempted to surprise her at the graduation. Laura gently touched my arm during her interview, demonstrating how she “touched her gown” at the graduation and said to her daughter, “It’s mom.” Yet, she was shocked at her daughter’s response:

[S]he looked at me. She looked like she saw a *ghost*... And she took off. She looked like she was trying to zigzag, like, and, and get away from me....I didn’t follow her because it was such a rejection.

Speaking in a low voice, Laura then stated: “I thought she was gonna grow up by then.”

Improvements in mother-child relationships weakened the mothers’ feelings of inadequacy and, thus, increased the likelihood that they perceived themselves as good mothers. As Ana explained, “You can never give up. You have to show them the love, that you love them, that you’re gonna be there regardless, that you made a mistake and you learn from them. You have to let them know that it’s part of life.” Living with her three children (two minors and one adult) at the time of interview, Ana believed that her

ability to communicate with her children made it easier for her to be a good mother after her incarceration. She elaborated: “I’m able to communicate with my kids. That makes it easier that I don’t feel like I have to hide anything and that they’re understanding. It makes it a lot easier.”

### **Mothering in Reentry and on Parole**

For the women, the maternal ideal to “always be there” for their children motivated them to make constructive changes in their lives post-incarceration and get their lives “on track” by making efforts to stay away from trouble like drug use and other forms of criminal activity that led to incarceration. This is particularly important given that over half of the 37 participants were, or had formerly been, on parole. They believed they had to be more cognizant of their actions and potential impacts on their children and mother-child relationships. Though the women believed mothers are expected to “put your children first no matter what,” a good mother was said to give her children the best resources they had or to obtain the necessary resources legitimately. While formerly incarcerated mothers may want to provide their children with material items, they understood that engaging in criminal behavior to accomplish this goal ultimately jeopardized their freedom and hurt mother-child relationships – conflicting with maternal ideals. The mothers described needing to consider the potential negative consequences of their actions in order to avoid maternal distress and create further complications in post-incarceration motherhood.

In addition to forward thinking about the consequences of one’s actions, learning from one’s mistake was also of importance in the women’s endeavor to be there for their children. Rashida, who had three adult children, believed that people were bound to make



mistakes in life and, thus, believed it was instrumental that mothers were not hard on themselves and, instead, learned from their mistakes in order to make future adjustments:

You learn from your mistakes. It's not like you're gonna make none; you *are*. Don't be so hard on yourself, you know. From what raised you, you put in play to raise [your children]. You know some of the things that *didn't* work or maybe it should be *modified* a little bit.

This learning process was evident for many of the women – like Priscilla, for instance.

Priscilla had a history of addiction, which led to her incarcerations and time under correctional supervision. Because she did not want her three children to view her negatively, she believed that learning to be patient in her reentry helped her become a good mother:

I've learned to grow a lot of patience....I've learned to watch what I don't want to be anymore, and just become that person that I want. I want to be able to die tomorrow and my kids be like: "You know what? My mother was this person but today, you know, she died this way." I don't want them to say, "Oh man, she was a drug addict and she died when she OD'd." You know? I want them to be able to say, "My mom, she was a drug addict, but that perseverance, she came so far and she died clean and sober." You know? I want a good ending, you know, and that gives me strength to...strive to do every day."

Even though physically situated in the community setting, participants continued to face various restrictions while under community-based corrections like parole supervision. When asked to describe her experience on parole, Vera replied: "not free." Because parole is a form of correctional supervision that is centered on surveillance, some may argue that parolees are not entitled to such freedom and the presence of strict stipulations is necessary for parole effectiveness.<sup>2</sup> Yet, according to Emma, formerly incarcerated mothers are particularly concerned about parole given that "parole is a

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<sup>2</sup> Contrary to the current emphasis of parole on surveillance and the risk management of groups deemed offenders, parole once took an interest in the individuals and functioned to facilitate their rehabilitation (see Feeley & Simon, 1992).

surveillance state” that is unpredictable, time-consuming, and filled with stipulations that are more detrimental when there are children involved:

A mother without children doesn't have to be concerned about the baggage of the system, like parole. Parole is a surveillance state: constantly have these stipulations, absorbs your time. Worry. Unpredictable when you gonna be released, when you have to make an appointment around holidays. It involves your radius - what you can't do. If your children are long distance, you can't travel because you need a pass. So, yea, there's a difference for someone who has kids and someone who don't.

In fact, the study participants believed that the array of parole restrictions they had to abide by affected their lives in general, but also as mothers, which was particularly true when mothers did not live with their children but maintained communication. For example, the mothers on parole had curfews that restricted them from being outside of their reported residence past a certain hour, and they were not allowed to leave before a given time, and they had to factor travel time into these restrictions. For example, when Marcia was previously paroled to her mother's home, her youngest daughter lived with Marcia's sister while her oldest daughter lived with her adopted family and her two sons lived their father. Even though Marcia was able to visit with her youngest daughter who lived nearby, Marcia's curfew placed an inconvenient time constraint on visits to her sons and her ability to help watch them when their father was unavailable:

I wanted to spend time with my kids. And [parole] avoided me from leaving my mom's house where I was paroled to, to spend two days with my kids. At times, my sons' father needed me to babysit or to go to a doctor's appointment and I couldn't....So, yea, it did affect my sons' lives. It did affect my life as a mother in my sons' life.

Like other mothers, Marcia would have also liked to occasionally spend the weekends with her sons as a means of spending quality time together. Yet, seeking approval from parole to do so was often deemed an inconveniently long process that discouraged women on parole from seeking such approval. It is important to note that while she was

on parole, Marcia did not have contact with her adopted daughter and did not mention any affects of parole on her relationship with this daughter. Even though they had built a relationship by the time of Marcia's interview, avoiding mention of this daughter alludes to a differential impact of parole when there is no communication. While on parole, mothers were also forbidden from fraternizing with other individuals whom they knew had criminal records, unless an accidental encounter or permitted by their parole officer. For Vera, this condition directly impacted communication with her daughter Vanessa, who also had a criminal record and with whom she shared a charge: "There was a point where I couldn't even be around my daughter because she has a record, and on one of the cases we're joint. So, how does that feel to not be able to be around your child? That's my child, you know!"

Thus, even when mothers had good intentions regarding constructive behaviors associated with their maternal identities, their position and label as formerly incarcerated hindered their ability to navigate motherhood. In addition to parole supervision, "the baggage of the system" made it difficult for women to be good mothers after incarceration; such baggage includes the financial problems and issues obtaining employment with a criminal record, the detrimental influence of addiction, the obstacles finding suitable housing for a family as well as the presence of distressing custodial arrangements.

### **Racial-Ethnic Background in Mothering**

Scholars argue that motherhood is often understood within the context of patriarchy and gendered expectations of mothers, but must also be understood within the context of racial and ethnic experiences and inequalities (such as experiencing

discrimination) and their implications for mothers of color (Collins 1994; Roberts 1993).

As argued by Bernadette, an African American participant:

[T]hey all are women and all women are alike. When I say alike, I mean as far as wanting the same thing like: love, feelings, and love they children. That much of the situation is like every mother; every mother wants to love they kids. But every mother of the races raise[s] they children entirely different.

What did the mothers perceive to be different between White mothers and Black mothers, including Hispanic mothers of Black racial backgrounds?

Interestingly, the participants believed that the children of White women largely engaged in wrongdoing as a result of maternal neglect and/or excessive demands, whereas the children of women of color largely engaged in wrongdoing as a result of social-structural obstacles. Consistent across the three racial-ethnic groups, the participants believed that White mothers were more distant from their children compared to mothers of color. They said, for example, that unlike Black and Hispanic mothers, White mothers did not communicate with their children, relied too heavily on finances in lieu of quality time, and either neglected their children or were too demanding of their children to be smart and excel academically. They also believed that the parenting practices of Whites led to more detrimental experiences and outcomes for their children. Specifically, they believed that this perceived detached mothering among White mothers was associated with increased risk of suicide among White children.<sup>3</sup> The participants, in

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<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, this belief is partly supported by existing research, which indicates that White teenagers are more likely to commit suicide than Black teenagers (Neeleman et al., 1998; see also Brown & Johns, 2015). This racial disparity is partly attributable to a weak cultural acceptance of suicide amongst the Black community (see Early, 1992; Stack et al., 1994) but may also be attributable to the negative correlation between suicide ideation and perceived familial support (Rudd, 1990). Brown and Johns (2015) draw attention to the increasing suicide rates among Black children and call for more research on changes in protective factors within the Black community.

essence, engaged in “othering” as they distinguished themselves from White mothers. According to Dervin (2012, p. 187), “othering is not just about the other but also about the self.” Specifically, this symbolic degradation of another group is a common way to form one’s identity given that one’s sense of self is defined in relation to the definitions given to other groups (Dervin, 2012; Jensen, 2011; Okolie, 2003). Thus, it is possible that the othering of White mothers and their parenting behaviors as a group reinforced the participants’ own maternal identities and shaped perceptions of their own mothering behaviors as superior.

### **Protecting Children of Color**

In contrast to the mothers’ perceptions of the parenting styles of White mothers, they primarily described similarities among women of color as they believed their own parenting as Black and Hispanic women was much more engaged. As Francesca argued, “Black women and Latina women are more loving and protective over their kids. I tell you that much....You gotta be on top of your kids.” Their involvement in their children’s lives was considered essential given the realities of racism and discrimination. The mothers believed that as racial-ethnic minorities, they needed to be protective of their children and the potential harms they were likely to have to tackle in society – as opposed to those of a White racial background. During the time I was conducting my study, there was significant media attention and news reporting acknowledging the unarmed Black lives taken at the hands of police officers.<sup>4</sup> When I asked Latoya what her biggest concern was regarding her two children, an 18-year-old son and a 14-year-old daughter, she responded:

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<sup>4</sup> To name a few: Michael Brown, Ferguson, MO; Eric Garner, Staten Island, NY; Tamir Rice, Cleveland, OH; Akai Gurley, Brooklyn, NY.

[T]hat my son will get shot down like a dog in the street by the police....[Y]ou see it everywhere and it's like a real thing that's happening. And so, every time he goes outside, I'm not afraid of, like, ummm so much someone in the street shooting him. I'm afraid of the police doing something to him, and that's my biggest fear.

Bianca, a mother of 16- and 28-year-old daughters, also mentioned the police shootings:

You fear what might happen to your kid. You hear about these kids getting shot by cops, you know, and they're totally innocent. You know, you just hear things that happen all over, you know, the United States. And it just makes you want to hold on to your kid a little harder.

When asked how important her racial-ethnic background was in raising her children,

Lucy noted that she “raise them to be safe” and she “try to keep them safe.” These

accounts suggest the import of understanding parenting within the contexts of

discrimination and racial inequalities intermingled with police use of force.

### **Differential Risks and Needs for Protection Between Racial-Ethnic Groups**

Though mothers in this study believed there were similarities in the need to protect children of color and show their children how to protect themselves, there were differential risks and needs for protection that varied along ethnic lines.

For instance, despite the consensus among study participants that children of color need to be kept safe, this need for protection was also tied to societal perceptions of ethnic identity, particularly when the children were of mixed ethnicity. When Marie was asked what was expected of her as a mother, she mentioned expectations to “protect my child” and “provide for my child,” which was common for all study participants.

Interestingly, however, she described further need for this protection given public perceptions of her 13-year-old son as having a particular ethnic background. Marie was a mother who considered herself Haitian American while her son's father was African American. Even though Marie's son “is Haitian American because his mother's

descendants are Haitian [and] his father's American," she believed that members of society "classify everyone who's Black as 'African American.'" Yet, she internalized this classification and, despite her son being ethnically mixed, she also referred to her son as being "African American." For that reason, she described her "*highly* important" role as a parent since "there's a lot of obstacles for him." Marie believed the generic perception of her son as being African American would inevitably introduce societal obstacles given that she believed a child associated with an African American background is destined to encounter hurdles in society. This account, given in response to expectations as a mother, demonstrates how the thought of impending obstacles in her son's path contributed to yet another concern she believed she needed to address as a mother.

In addition, participants noted potential threats to reintegration efforts that varied depending on the predominant ethnic group where their children resided. For instance, Makayla was an African American mother who lived with her 11-year-old son, and she grew up in a predominantly African American neighborhood in Harlem. She stated that, as a child, her mother never bought her "up-to-date fashion" and, as a result, her peers always talked badly about her appearance. Consequently, Makayla learned how to physically fight back against the verbal abuse and she engaged in drug sales to maintain a better appearance since "name brand is the thing to be." Yet, her childhood experiences in Harlem, where she used to sell drugs, shaped her own parenting as it related to her son's appearance and attire. As Makayla explained: "I want him to be like: no worries, no stress, no worry about people talking about him." Even though she could not always buy him name brand clothing, she made sure that her son always wore name brand sneakers to prevent the types of verbal abuse and fights she encountered when she was his age in a

predominantly African American neighborhood. Yet, Makayla also believed that their current residence was a protective factor against such verbal abuse because she and her son lived in a predominantly Hispanic area of Astoria. According to the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, the census tract where they resided was approximately 46% “Hispanic or Latino” and 34% “Black or African American alone.” Based on Makayla’s experience in this Hispanic area, she believed “they’re not really into .... [being] fancy, fresh, fly. So it’s not much that I have to compete with in this neighborhood.” Thus, she felt as though there was less pressure to purchase the more expensive clothing items for her son. Makayla’s account alludes to differences in financial difficulties post-incarceration that are linked to cultural interests and bully-like responses to things like fashion. This demands further comparative research to directly examine the risks of bullying on formerly incarcerated mothers’ interests and likelihood to spend money on certain items for their children as a form of self-representation, particularly in the face of financial difficulties post-incarceration.

### **Conclusion**

Normative descriptions of motherhood typically entail intensive mothering behaviors like being the central caregiver, spending a great deal of money, sacrificing one’s time, and wholeheartedly adhering to experts’ recommendations (see Hays, 1996; McMahon, 1995). While these descriptions are largely embedded in class-based hegemony of White, middle-class ideologies (Hays, 1996; Roberts, 1993), research shows that groups like employed mothers and transnational mothers,<sup>5</sup> for instance, may

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<sup>5</sup> Transnational mothers work and/or live in a different country than their country of origin where their children reside (Colen, 1995; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997).



reframe such notions of good mothering according to their circumstances (Christopher, 2012; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997).<sup>6</sup> Even though the mothers' narratives presented in this chapter show some consistencies in behaviors deemed as good mothering like caring about children's wellbeing, special attention should be directed to the unique post-incarceration experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers (Garcia, 2016b). This chapter demonstrates how these women deal with post-incarceration barriers concerning mother-child relationships, custodial arrangements, and community-based supervision – to name a few. Thus, they had to redefine what maternal ideals looked like in action in order to adhere to ideals of good mothering within the context of the post-incarceration circumstances they were navigating. In other words, formerly incarcerated mothers may enact motherhood by working around prevalent constraints and they may attempt to do so in a manner that is unnoticed by those who hold restrictive notions of what motherhood should look like in action. Reentry programs have begun to include a parenting component to better assist in rebuilding mother-child relationships and enhancing mothering experiences after women's release. Yet, in order to accomplish this, reentry programs must adequately meet the mothers where they stand by looking beyond socially constructed understandings of what motherhood is *supposed* to entail and, instead, acknowledging the women's efforts at enacting maternal behaviors within the context of post-incarceration constraints. Such information provides a different insight into

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher (2012, p. 87–88) found that employed mothers justified their employment by highlighting individual benefits and “challenging the notion that children's needs should always come first.” In their work on transnational mothers, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997, p. 562) discovered: “Rather than replacing caregiving with breadwinning definitions of motherhood, they appear to be expanding their definitions of motherhood to encompass breadwinning that may require long-term physical separations.”

discussions of parental incarceration, which often focuses on the children of incarcerated parents.

It was useful to learn of the internalized maternal ideals held by the formerly incarcerated mothers – specifically, who they deemed as “good” mothers and what good mothering consisted of. The women were not likely to emphasize aspects associated with “intensive mothering,” instead, they often stressed fundamental features that were not contingent upon normative residential, custodial, and communicative circumstances. Good mothers were described as women who were “always there” for their children, which entailed mothers providing their children with unconditional love, putting their concerns before their own interests, and being available to listen, talk to, and advise them during times of need. Despite the import of maternal identities, the women’s ability to enact these identities in various situations was complicated by the complexities in their life circumstances post-incarceration.

The data presented here demonstrates several important themes regarding how post-incarceration motherhood was navigated, especially in the contexts of nonresidential mothering, noncustodial mothering, and mothering without contact. The formerly incarcerated mothers emphasized meanings of motherhood that were associated with *practical* actions they performed, which in turn reinforced their maternal identities. At times, complicated circumstances post-incarceration caused mothers to simultaneously meet and contradict their own ideals of motherhood. Even when there were difficult or non-existent relationships with their children, some mothers did not allow these negative situations to dictate how they saw their overall character or influence as mothers. This served as a protective factor to avoid maternal distress, but mothers were not always

successful. For instance, the lack of contact with older or earlier children sometimes induced distress, which shaped mothers' subsequent efforts at enacting maternal ideals with their later children. In general, the formerly incarcerated mothers often tried to find or create situations in which they enacted their maternal identities, which in turn allowed them to maintain salient maternal identities post-incarceration.

The women believed hardships associated with their ability to be what they thought of as "good mothers" stemmed more generally from their incarceration, which often negatively affected their children's emotional wellbeing and/or mother-child relationships. Incarceration also shaped stumbling blocks to enact maternal ideals upon the women's release, motivating them to make adjustments in their maternal behaviors. For instance, mothers made attempts to offset the instabilities in their children's lives by working to enhance communication, learn about their children and their growth, reacquaint their children with healthier routines, and provide for their children in the ways they deemed available for them to do so. As described above, it is likely that maternal conflicts sometimes influenced the women to reshape the meanings associated with certain behaviors, giving these actions greater weight, in order to uphold maternal identities. Though the formerly incarcerated women sometimes experienced a conflict between their own maternal ideals and their previous actions as mothers, and may not have been "good" mothers to some of their children, they still made adjustments in their lives to enact subsequent behaviors that coincided with their own maternal ideals.

For the women who were grandmothers or were soon-to-be grandmothers, grandchildren presented another potential recipient of maternal attention. In fact, such mothers noted their grandchildren in some aspect when describing things they did as

*mothers* and when describing their most rewarding moment as *mothers* since their release from incarceration. These women described trying to be involved in their grandchildren's lives and having pride in these relationships when they were prevalent. Yet, attempts to build relationships with grandchildren or give advice about their grandchildren sometimes came with hostility from their own children who still held resentment towards them associated with their incarceration. Though this connection was not made during the interviews, there may also be some racial-ethnic incentives in the mothers' desires to focus on mothering their grandchildren given the significant and immersed role of grandmothers (and extended family) particularly in the family dynamic of African Americans, Hispanics, and West Indians (see Collins, 2009; Hill, 2003; Jacobs & Mollborn, 2012; Jambunathan et al., 2000; Pruchno, 1999; Smith, 1962; Stack & Burton, 1994).

Formerly incarcerated mothers must often adjust themselves to life post-incarceration while simultaneously making efforts to enact maternal identities. But not all women were able to manage this balance without problems. As Brown and Bloom (2009, p. 325) suggest, successful reentry for formerly incarcerated mothers involves "taking up the reins of 21st-century parenting—with all its complexities—with the added dimension of being under the scrutiny of law enforcement agents." Women in my study suggested that parole supervision served as an added form of scrutiny for the formerly incarcerated mothers. Huebner et al. (2010, p. 237) found that "mothers were significantly less likely to fail on parole than women without children." Yet, the findings I have presented here illustrate some of the hindrances parole conditions may place on formerly incarcerated mothers and their maternal relationships with their children. Thus, while other research

shows that formerly incarcerated mothers may be less likely to fail on parole (Huebner et al., 2010), this may be at the expense of their own desires to fully enact other constructive behaviors associated with their maternal identities.

## CHAPTER 5

### GENDER, RACE/ETHNICITY, MOTHERHOOD, AND A CRIMINAL RECORD IN THE LABOR MARKET

Formerly incarcerated mothers of color are (re)entering the workforce with a multitude of potential disadvantages. To start with, research demonstrates the prevalence of both gender segregation in the labor market, and differences in the expectations and treatment of women and men within the workplace (Browne, 2000; England & Browne, 1992; Reskin, 1993). Women are more likely than men to be involved in service work, and even with the same qualifications as men, they are still less likely to be hired in predominantly male occupations (Browne, 2000; England & Browne, 1992; Reskin, 1993).<sup>1</sup> As Reskin (1993, p. 241) explains:

Segregation is more than physical separation. It is a fundamental process in social inequality. The characteristics on which groups are sorted symbolize dominant or subordinate status and become the basis for differential treatment. Indeed, segregation facilitates unequal treatment by subjecting groups to different rewards systems.

In fact, women receive less pay than men, face gendered barriers in receiving promotions, and encounter paternalism and harassment that may push them out of male-dominated workplaces (Browne, 2000; England & Browne, 1992; Reskin, 1993; Roscigno & Bobbitt-Zeher, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> These differences may be associated with two overarching factors that also influence one another: the choices made by labor market participants and the constraints placed on them by employers (England & Browne, 1992). In other words, both the supply of applicants (for instance, their self-selection into particular fields) and the demand by employers (including stereotypes and assumptions about women's competencies) can shape job segregation (Browne & Misra, 2003; Reskin, 1993), with important implications in and beyond the workplace.

Yet, women are not simply “women”: race and ethnicity play a critical role in shaping gender inequalities in the labor market. As Browne and Misra (2003, p. 488) explain, gender and race are social constructs that are coupled with one another: “Race is ‘gendered’ and gender is ‘racialized,’ so that race and gender fuse to create unique experiences and opportunities for all groups.” For example, Black women are not viewed or treated as equal to White women in the labor market and beyond; rather, they are considered subordinate as *Black* women. Thus, not surprisingly, Hispanic and African American women are less likely to be hired (Bendick et al., 1994; Bendick et al., 1991) and experience higher unemployment rates in comparison to White women (Browne 2000; Browne & Misra, 2003). Relative to Whites, they also receive lower wages and fewer employment “rewards” for the education, skills, and experience they bring to the workplace (Bound & Dresser, 1999; Browne 2000; Browne & Misra, 2003). Human capital explanations of workplace inequalities (i.e., explanations that focus on what employees bring to the table) thus have limited utility for explaining how women of color are situated within the labor market (Ortiz & Roscigno, 2009); instead, stereotypical judgments impact decision points in the labor market and workplace, for instance, as employers make evaluations for hires and promotions (Bendick et al., 1994). As a consequence, there is a “sorting of individuals into jobs” (Browne & Misra, 2003, p. 498) that disproportionately impacts racial-ethnic minority women in both the labor market and within workplace environments.

These experiences are further complicated for mothers in the workplace. Holding the social role as primary caretakers for children, mothers are expected to experience shifts in employment commitments during pregnancies and as they manage maternal

duties (Browne, 2000; Kennelly, 2000; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Thus, mothers' competency may be questioned during the hiring process (see Correll et al. 2007; Kennelly, 2000)<sup>2</sup> and evaluated negatively in the workplace due to biased perceptions and expectations employers attach to the maternal role (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).<sup>3</sup> Mothers' racial-ethnic background can further shape biased assumptions and treatment from employers that may affect hiring and promotional decisions,<sup>4</sup> indicating that attention should also be given to employment and financial experiences of mothers across ethnically diverse minority groups.

### **Being Formerly Incarcerated in the Labor Market**

What does the intersectionality of gender, racial-ethnic background, and motherhood mean for those who have been officially labeled criminals and spent time incarcerated? The extant literature offers some clues. In addition to the gendered and racial inequalities that generally shape mothers' experiences in the labor market and workplace, a bout of incarceration introduces additional burdens in obtaining and

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<sup>2</sup> Kennelly (2000) found that employers introduced discussions of mothering expectations as potentially interfering with the future work of female applicants. Compared to women without children who share equal work qualifications, mothers are perceived as less competent and committed, are less likely to receive callbacks and recommendations for hire, and are perceived as significantly less promotable (Correll et al. 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Biased perceptions and expectations of women who are mothers can make mothers less favorable candidates for promotions. In fact, compared to women without children, mothers with two or more children experience a wage penalty – controlling for a variety of factors such as race, marital status, and job characteristics (Budig & England, 2001; Glauber, 2007; Waldfogel, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Black mothers are often perceived to be single mothers during the hiring process (Kennelly, 1999), negatively affecting perceptions of work competency and filtering them out of potential work opportunities. All else equal, married African American mothers with more than two children fare worse in the wage penalty than Hispanics (Glauber, 2007).



maintaining work (Arditti, 2012; Cox, 2011; Enos, 2012). In addition, incarceration may indirectly influence a drop in long-term earnings due to gaps in work history during periods of imprisonment (Apel & Sweeten, 2010). Research shows that the majority of employers are reluctant to hire an applicant with a criminal record (Holzer et al., 2004; Pager, 2003).<sup>5</sup> Many run criminal background checks on job applicants, which has become extremely accessible and inexpensive with the advance of technology (Jacobs, 2006; Jacobs & Crepet, 2007). On the one hand, information on criminal records can be used and framed as justification of reasonable risk in the workplace, hindering the hiring process. On the other hand, information on criminal records may also help employers make better-informed decisions (Holzer et al., 2004). However, even those employers who do not run background checks may “exclude from consideration applicants with characteristics that may be indicative of a criminal history” (Holzer et al., 2004, p. 227), such as educational background and gaps in work history.

My study participants believed they were at a disadvantage when seeking employment due to felony questions on job applications and subsequent criminal background checks. For instance, Marie was unemployed at the time of her interview. Approximately three weeks before we spoke, she had waited on a line for two-and-a-half hours to attend a public job fair. After leaving her resume for a retail position, she was called the next evening for an initial interview. It was at this point that she was given the job application paperwork: “The application says, ‘Have you ever been convicted of a

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<sup>5</sup> In New York, the setting of the current research, it is illegal to deny someone a job solely based on his or her criminal record; but there are two exceptions. This policy does not apply when the job has a direct relationship with the person’s past convictions or when there is “an unreasonable risk to property or to the safety of others” (New York City Bar, n.d., p. 4).

felony?’ I checked yes. It’s on the first page, like the fourth line down.” After the initial interview, she was asked to interview with another manager of the retail chain. Both did not directly inquire into her felony conviction during the interviews, even though she was asked about the large gap in her work history.<sup>6</sup> Marie later learned that they wanted to offer her a position but was told, “it’s contingent on a background check” and the managers needed to wait for the results before making their final decision:

And you know what really upset me? All those other people you interviewed, you mean to tell me you’re waiting for background checks for them too? No. You’re waiting for people that checked off convicted felon.

Marie believed the need to disclose her felony conviction put her at risk of missing a job opportunity:

If I didn’t check off convicted felon, I would’ve started two weeks ago and then what? I would’ve gotten fired. So I’m damned if I do, damned if I don’t....But the thing about it is: I was honest about mine....You’re knocked down before you can even get up. You’re already down.

Similarly, Makayla also described being in a bind during the application process, believing employers “don’t give us a chance”:

[Y]ou gotta lie on your application and if they find out you lied, then they wanna fire you anyway. But that’s the only way you would have given me a chance. And that’s extremely hard. That’s the hardest thing.

Makayla believed “finding employment with a felony is the hardest thing....As soon as they see felony, ‘uhhhh.’ I feel like it shouldn’t be on the application at all.” This sentiment was also noted in reference to criminal background checks. Emma, for instance, had been released four years prior to her interview. Emma believed the greatest

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<sup>6</sup> Even though they studied young males, Apel and Sweeten (2010) bring attention to the weak human capital of formerly incarcerated individuals and argue that the gaps in work history are more detrimental while on the labor market than the stigma of incarceration.

challenge she faced since her release was “finding employment. It’s a barrier because a lot of time[s] they want background checks.”

Whether employers gained knowledge of their felony convictions from job applications or during criminal background checks, the participants believed both factors posed serious challenges in finding employment. In fact, excluding four participants with internships, over two-thirds of the mothers I interviewed were unemployed at the time of their interview. After I concluded data collection for my study (October 2015), new laws became effective in New York City banning employers’ inquiries into a job applicant’s criminal record before a conditional job offer is made, deeming this unlawfully discriminatory.<sup>7</sup> While the recent “ban the box” prohibitions acknowledge the discriminatory practices towards ex-offenders on the labor market, as described above, this does not undo the harm done or offset other employment obstacles formerly incarcerated women may encounter.

Interestingly, the women I interviewed also distinguished their employment obstacles from those faced by formerly incarcerated men. They felt that getting work was slightly easier for men and believed they had to work harder than men in order to obtain employment after their release. As Kerry-Ann explained:

I know America says differently that they’re stigmatized and they can’t get a job and a lot of different things, but I find that society accepts them more readily than if a female was in there [i.e., incarcerated]....They [formerly incarcerated men], you know, they’re at a dime a dozen now. Almost every one in three Black males that you meet, you find that they had some bout with the criminal justice system.

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<sup>7</sup> The full description of the current New York law (as of October 2015) can be found at: <http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=1739365&GUID=EF70B69C-074A-4B8E-9D36-187C76BB1098>

While acknowledging men's disproportionately higher incarceration rates, the women I spoke with believed there were many more employment opportunities that catered to men's interests and physical capabilities than was the case for women. As Marie argues, men return from prison and are more likely to obtain jobs involving physical labor because employers "don't care about the felony. But, the women, we usually stick close to customer service, either home health attendant. Being honest: things that are basically dealing with the private sector." Such differences in employment opportunities were believed to force women to work harder. As Makayla surmised:

I feel like when we are formerly incarcerated – I can't say that for men, but – for women coming home, we will work the hardest. Because we know we already have plus one up on us, that we have a felony.

The women believed the social stigma attached to being labeled a "felon" or having a criminal record was greater for women than men in the workforce. This disproportionate treatment might also be tied to perceptions that women who are "felons" are doubly deviant because they represent the opposite of what it means to be "women" – docile, fragile and compliant.

This brings to forefront the type of jobs held by the eight mothers who were engaged in paid work at the time of their interview, including work that was "off the books" in which earnings were not reported or taxed. Among the employed mothers, four worked as providers of some sort (e.g., nanny, unlicensed caregiver for the elderly, outreach counselor), two worked in cleaning, one worked in customer service, and one – an outlier – worked as a college professor. With the exception of the one professor, all of the employed mothers worked in the low-wage sector and in occupations consistent with perceived "women's work" – that is, caring for and communicating with others as well as

duties associated with keeping things organized and tidy. This may be tied to both the “supply” of potential employees and the “demand” of employers: (1) There may be a special interest from the women, themselves, in the generative nature of service work to help others in need (see Leverentz, 2014; Maruna, 2001). (2) Stereotypes of them having weakened communication skills, personal skills, and work skills (Graffam et al., 2008) may be of less relevance in these occupations or may be outweighed by perceptions of women being quite capable of doing these specific jobs.

### **The Role of Racial-Ethnic Background for Post-Incarceration Employment and Financial Assistance**

The racial-ethnic background of mothers played a role in their post-incarceration employment experiences, and the financial assistance they received from family members. According to Ortiz (2014, p. 113): “There is a clear racial hierarchy among employers when it comes to interviewing and hiring women with a prison record, with White women having better chances than Hispanic women and Hispanic women having a better chance than Black women.”

In social perceptions of minority ethnic groups, West Indians have been referred to as the “model minority” transcending African Americans in culture, work ethic and attitude (see Waters, 1999). In fact, published work has referred to this ethnic group as “the other African Americans” (see Shaw-Taylor & Tuch, 2007). This perception of West Indians as the model minority may shape their employment opportunities under White employers since White employers have expressed preferences for hiring this ethnic group in lieu of hiring African Americans (Waters, 1999). These perceptions may be associated with disparities in labor force participation for West Indian women in comparison to African American and Hispanic women. In New York City, for example, 68% of West

Indian women report being in the labor force, which is higher than the percentage of Hispanic women (55%) and women referred to as “Black or African American alone” (60%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013; see also Model, 1995).<sup>8</sup> These ethnic differences in labor force participation were also found among the formerly incarcerated women interviewed in this study. Specifically, the West Indian women were more likely to be employed or interning at the time of their interview (50%) compared to the women of African American (33%) or Hispanic background (40%). Yet, when study participants discussed race/ethnicity with regard to work, the work ethic of West Indians was only distinguished from that of African Americans, not Hispanics.

Marie was a Haitian mother who spoke about employment differences between West Indians and African Americans (who she refers to as Black Americans), and the associated clashes between the two ethnic groups regarding their perceived work ethics:

A lot of times, like, Americans and Haitians have always clashed because, you know, I guess they thought that: “Haitians, oh, they got 3 or 4 jobs. They always got 3 or 4 jobs.” But you know what? They not on welfare. They’re not. You seldom find many Haitians or Jamaicans on that stuff, they’ll have 3 or 4 jobs....And you know, I guess, um, the African American is seen – and I’m not saying that I do – they’re seen as the lazy laidback type from the Haitian people. Haitian people think they better than Black Americans.

Then, in a tone of disgust, she imitates other Haitians saying *Black Amerikan sa* (Haitian Creole for *Those Black Americans*). She elaborated on this sentiment in English: “It’s bad, but it’s the truth because they feel like, you know, ‘Black Americans, they are on welfare, they’re in projects.... They don’t try to get out of the projects. They don’t try to do better for themselves.’” Her perceptions are consistent with perceptions often held by White employers that West Indians are a “model minority” with better work-related

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<sup>8</sup> Refer to issues with the “black or African American alone” classification, as found in the *Research Design* section of the Methodology and Project Description chapter.

habits than African Americans, making them more worthy of being hired (Waters 1999; see also Model, 1995).

While Marie believed societal perceptions of West Indians spoke to their strong work ethics, these stereotypes may also harm West Indian women's relations with African American colleagues and administrators, as West Indians are sometimes perceived as taking African Americans' jobs. Having new African American superiors at her place of work, Kerry-Ann believed she was treated unfairly due to her background as a Jamaican woman:

Kerry-Ann: One of the things when you identify with a West Indian that I found with the former administration: they don't like West Indians.

JG: Why?

Kerry-Ann: They just don't. They feel like we come here and take their jobs.... But the administration, they hated West Indians. You find that a lot. You find that a lot.

Although West Indians do not collectively receive more gross earnings than African Americans (Model, 1995), they receive hiring preferences from White employers that may influence hostility from African Americans. This is consistent with Model's (2001, p. 53) statement that "the two groups of Blacks are both each other's closest companions and each other's closest competitors." As a result of the workplace clashes that can arise between West Indians and African Americans, Kerry-Ann described passing<sup>9</sup> as African American in order to advance within predominantly African American work environments: "I identify with being a West Indian, but I also identify with being a Black American onlyyy because, like, sometimes I have to do that to get around the system and

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<sup>9</sup> Literature on "passing" often describes passing for another racial group (see, for instance, Harper, 1998; Khanna & Johnson, 2010), but Kerry-Ann's account describes passing for another ethnic group within the same racial umbrella (but see Waters, 1994).

get in the system.” This account is interesting as it demonstrates steps taken to progress in the labor market and within the workplace. While a West Indian identity may have its advantages in the labor market with White employers, and passing as African American in this social situation can be associated with downward social mobility (Foner, 1985; Model, 1995; Waters 1999), the opposite may be true in predominantly African American workplaces where passing may be beneficial to progress.

In addition, participants of West Indian and Hispanic background had similar discussions with me about “foreigner”<sup>10</sup> experiences regarding familial responses to criminal charges that involved illegitimate financial gain. Josefina was a Dominican mother who was out on bail for 10 weeks after spending approximately 3 months at Rikers Island. Josefina’s mother borrowed money from a family member in the Dominican Republic in order to post her bail. However, instead of telling her family the truth about why Josefina was in jail and needed the bail money, Josefina’s mother told family members that she had been in a fight in which she cut the other girl involved. This was done because Josefina would have faced more judgment from her family if they knew she was caught with someone else’s credit card and charged with identity theft. While Josefina was concerned that she was falsely presented as a violent person, her mother believed this was the best approach in order to receive financial help from family members. This financial assistance, however, also presented Josefina with additional financial obligations outside of the United States; though Josefina was working at the time of her interview, she was struggling financially to pay the debt in the Dominican Republic that was accruing interest.

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<sup>10</sup> The term “foreigner” was not used in reference to those who are exclusively foreign-born, but also includes those who are native-born with ties to a foreign country.



Marie was convicted and incarcerated for burglary, believing burglary was more financially effective and emotionally stable than prostitution; her Haitian mother, however, disagreed. Marie depicted a previous exchange she had with her mother about the burglary charge that led to her incarceration:

I said, "You know what, mom? I rather be a thief than a whore."

[She said]: "Oh really? Well, I rather you be a whore than a thief."

[I said]: "*Oh, really?*"

She's like: "Yes! Because in my country a whore has more respect than a thief."

Mimicking a tone of disgust, Marie imitated her mother: "You see what they say: '*Oh vole* (Haitian Creole for *Thief*).'" Marie then elaborated on her mother's explanation of why Haitians respond this way: "a thief is seen as somebody who can not be trusted, can not let in your house. Like, you have no respect." This sentiment has also been noted in published work: "in Haitian culture the worst thing you could possibly be is a thief, a *vole*" (Fournier & Herlihy, 2006, p. 170-171). Marie distinguished this cultural response from the American understanding in which a woman who shoplifts is praised as "she gets money," while a woman who prostitutes is condemned given that "she sells her ass." This reflects on Marie's earlier point regarding the work ethic of West Indians; there is more respect for women who worked for their money as opposed to women who took money that was not earned.

Marie's experience as a West Indian woman is similar to Josefina's experience as a Hispanic woman in that they both would have faced additional stigma from others in their respective countries, especially extended family, due to their illegitimate means of financial gain. Their behaviors were deemed to be socially and culturally unacceptable, to a greater extent than other types of crime. Such cultural values and familial perceptions

of justified behaviors have serious implications for the women when they are in need at various stages of the criminal justice system.

Even though the West Indian mothers distinguished their work ethic from that of African Americans, all three groups often referred to shared obstacles in obtaining work as Black or Hispanic women emerging from in the criminal justice system. For instance, as Marie explained:

When you apply for jobs, up front, you already have a strike against you. One, you're a woman, you're a minority. You already know that men make more money in any sector that we compare with them. Two, I'm a Black woman. And then, on top of that, I have compounded my situation by becoming a felon.

This account demonstrates the interplay of gender, justice-involvement, and the collective identification of race in women's experiences with the labor market post-incarceration.

### **The Influence of Educational Attainment**

Women's employment difficulties post-incarceration are at times associated with their limited educational attainment – typically, less than a high school degree or the General Educational Development (G.E.D.) equivalent before and after incarceration (see Baunach, 1985; Brown & Bloom, 2009; Staley, 2008). However, this was not particularly the case for the mothers I interviewed given that 76% had *at least* a high school diploma or successfully passed the G.E.D. exam. For one mother, 7<sup>th</sup> grade was the furthest she had gotten in school; and eight mothers completed some high school. Nevertheless, nine mothers received their high school diplomas and eight mothers obtained their G.E.D., including one who unsuccessfully tried a Medical Assistant route. One mother had an Associate's Degree and seven mothers had some college experience, including one who was also a certified Medical Assistant. Two mothers completed some graduate classes towards their Master's Degree – one prior to her incarceration and the other was enrolled

at the time of her interview. In addition, one mother had earned her doctorate prior to her incarceration.

Though criminal justice reports often describe women offenders with less than a high school degree, some are able to earn a degree or to participate in a variety of educational classes while behind bars. For example, of the 2,859 women under custody in New York State in 2006, 9% earned a degree during imprisonment of which 7.3% earned their G.E.D. (Staley, 2008). Among the women I interviewed, four had obtained their G.E.D. behind bars; of the seven mothers with some college education, one earned college credits during her incarceration.

Two of the three mothers with the highest level of education were of West Indian descent – Jamaican and Haitian.<sup>11</sup> Marie noted that education was the “biggest thing” for her, given that she’s always been in school and the importance of education was instilled in her as a “foreigner.” She noted that she and her two siblings all graduated from college and she would like her own son to graduate from college as well. She attributed this emphasis on educational attainment to her ethnic background and values, which she distinguished from that of Americans: “My mother is a foreigner. Foreigners firmly believe that an education is the way out even in an American society, but a lot of Americans don't believe in that.” Marie later elaborated on why she believes this perceived difference exists: “A lot of Americans don't really understand that I guess because they’re born here and whatever but foreigners come from countries where, one, school is a big deal. It’s taken seriously.” West Indian women in my study believed that

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<sup>11</sup> In New York City, West Indian women are more likely than Hispanic and Black or African American women to report being a high school graduate or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

the educational values of foreigners accounted for the perceived higher educational attainment among West Indians compared to African Americans. In this way, they expressed accounts similar to those reported in Mary Waters' (1999) *Black Identities*, which was based on interviews in New York City. Despite these perceptions, in New York City West Indian women are no different than African American women in educational attainment – 82% and 81%, respectively, are high school graduates or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). In addition, Hispanics were also referred to as “foreigners” like West Indians; yet, Hispanic women are actually less likely to graduate from high school compared to West Indian women: 65% and 82% respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). This may be associated with a variety of factors like cultural capital, poverty rates, and educational opportunities in their countries of origin as well as in the United States (see Schneider et al., 2006; Solórzano et al., 2005).

In addition to reflecting on the role of ethnicity in their educational attainment, formerly incarcerated mothers in my study consistently described the importance of education in order to be hired or to get a better-paying job. For instance, Carolina was planning to begin G.E.D. classes when we spoke because – as she described – “I know I can’t get a job without a G.E.D.” With some college experience, Rashida noted: “It wasn’t that I wasn’t smart enough to get the job; I had to get marketable. That’s why I took the steps to make sure that I was marketable to get a job....That’s why I went to school.”

While some mothers expressed a desire to go to school in order to get a job or a better-paying job, mothers also expressed a need to work first in order to save money and then go to school. This presented them with the dilemma of where to first concentrate

their efforts. Should they focus on their education to enhance their chances of employment or a better job? Considering their financial difficulties, some mothers believed it was unclear how to reach the most meaningful outcome of financial stability. Other mothers expressed concern and disappointment with the deprivation of employment opportunities even after they successfully completed educational programs. As Makayla noted, “I want to go to school, but I don’t want to put in years in school and then my felony stops me from getting a job offer.” At times, this concern became a reality. Bernadette, who had her high school diploma, explained: “I went to computer school for two years but I still ain’t get no job. I learned how to do computer, and no job. That’s a hard field to get into, but I really thought I was gonna get that job and be making the big money. But I didn’t make nothing.”

Mothers who were able to demonstrate some educational accomplishments reported that this had a positive impact on the children with whom they maintained contact. At the time of her interview, Odessa had finished her first semester at a nearby community college. She described the influence of this accomplishment on her son who was entering the 10<sup>th</sup> grade: “He’s excited. He says he’s happy for me. He’s proud. I told him about the good grades. And he’s like, yeah, he gonna go to college now too – even more so now.” This sentiment was shared even when mothers completed smaller educational programs, as Makayla described:

I was in this program and we did a computer class. And we actually graduated and we actually did the cap and gown and everything. And my son asked me for that picture and he has it in a picture frame in his room and it says “I love my mommy”.... I felt like that was a role model and, you know, he looked up to that. And I had my cap and gown on, you know, and it wasn’t even a big, you know, degree or anything. It was just a little computer class. And he has that picture on his dresser. And that made me feel like a good mom. Like a role model, but a good mom.

These accomplishments were not only a demonstration of positive behaviors and encouragement for their children to do the same, but these accomplishments also served to reinforce notions of being a “good mom” in their navigation of a maternal identity.

While educational efforts may help formerly incarcerated women remain in constructive activities and serve as a positive example to their children, this does not eliminate employers’ stereotypes and the challenges that result from the multiple burdens for racial-ethnic minority mothers with criminal records in the workforce. Criminological research often focuses on the average low educational attainment among women in the criminal justice system and how this may present substantial obstacles to obtain suitable employment post-incarceration. This has influenced many reentry programs emphasizing individual development through computer classes and workshops to develop people skills. Yet, despite educational accomplishments, formerly incarcerated women continue to face barriers in obtaining employment. This has also been found in existing research on justice-involved women. Ortiz (2014, p. 116), for example, found “no indication of a community college degree improving women’s employment prospects in the entry-level job market.” The Hispanic women in her study did not receive more favorable responses as job seekers when they had a community college degree compared to a high school diploma, regardless of whether they corresponded online or in-person (Ortiz, 2014). She also discovered that – although not significant – Black women were more likely to receive favorable responses when they had a community college degree compared to a high school diploma, but this was only true when there was in-person contact; when there was online correspondence, instead, Black women with only a high school diploma fared better than Black women with a community college degree (Ortiz, 2014). Even for the

one woman in my study who held a faculty position – the most prestigious job held by any of the mothers I interviewed – she still experienced a proliferation of burdens within her workplace environment:

I find like I'm *always* on the defensive and always having to work. I worked twice as hard before, now I have to work four times as hard because then I had an *extra* stigma attached to me. It wasn't just: you're Black, you're a woman. Now, it's you're single, you had children out of wedlock, and you have a criminal conviction. It quadruples it.

Despite the high educational accomplishment of a doctorate and her employment in a respected social position as a professor, this mother continued to face judgment in the workplace based on the intersection of her race, gender, criminal charges, and maternal circumstances.

### **Post-Incarceration Mothering through Financial Barriers**

Often indigent or fraught with financial problems, individuals who are formerly incarcerated frequently report difficulties in their ability to cover court fines, supervision fees and child support, in addition to meeting household or familial expectations (Brown & Bloom, 2009; La Vigne et al., 2009; Patel & Philip, 2012). These hurdles are further strained for women who identify as mothers and believe it is their duty as mothers to support their children. Often hoping and expected to support their children, mothers often seek funds suitable to enact desired maternal behaviors and to support themselves post-incarceration. Yet, it is not uncommon for formerly incarcerated mothers to face unemployment or, if employed, receive low pay. For instance, over two-thirds of the mothers I interviewed were unemployed at the time of their interview, excluding the four mothers who were interning at their respective program locations. For about a quarter of the mothers, insufficient finances and unemployment were identified as the greatest

challenges they faced as mothers since their release – discussions that were not limited to mothers with custody or with minor children.

### **The Strains and Motivations**

Mothers' desires to provide for their under-aged children placed additional strains on them as they navigated motherhood through limited funds post-incarceration. They were justifiably concerned about the effect of their limited funds on their children. For instance, Makayla believed finding a job was the greatest challenge she faced as a mother after her incarceration. Living with her 11-year-old son, she was concerned about her son taking the same route she did of going "to the street" if she was unable to support him:

I sold drugs to get my own stuff....If I can't do it for him, this might be where he might go. You know what I mean?...My biggest fear is that...he will go to jail....I just want to be able to provide for him. I wanna be able to keep him happy.

Makayla had engaged in drug sales at a young age to support herself, and she was concerned that her inability to financially support her son could shape *his* pathway into criminal activity, if he also turned to crime as a means of supporting himself.

Odessa's 15-year-old son was under the full custody of his father. Her son's father was demanding money in the form of child support, but Odessa did not believe he was appropriately supporting their son financially. Although her son did not live with her and was not under her custody, he would contact her regarding wants and needs. Odessa granted her son's wishes whenever he called asking for material things, even though she owed the state a significant amount in child support that accrued over the years.

I owe \$20,000 in child support like I don't take care of my son, when I clearly take care of him. I pay cell phone bills and I still get a child support letter to pay child support. But I owe \$20,000 in child support; I can't drive, I can't find a job driving because I can't get my fucking license....And right now, it's still adding on. Right now, like I get a fucking thing every week – \$80 now. It's down to \$80. It was like \$170. Now, it's \$80 a week. And I could go and get it changed to like \$25 a month. I



don't mind taking care of my kid. I give him more than that....He want a guitar. He wants to play the guitar. He drops shit, he picks shit up and drops it whenever he wants to. So, I'm not even sure if he's gonna play it but if that's what he wants, I'm gonna buy it. Why can't he ask his father? I don't know. But, he [son] is cool with me when he wants something, definitely.

Odessa continued to provide her son with the things he wanted and bought things, like school clothes, that she felt he needed, but the high amount of unpaid child support simultaneously hindered her ability to move forward and obtain a better job to support herself. The unpaid child support led to the suspension of her driver's license, which she needed for a dream job she was trying to land working with mentally impaired children at an organization based in New York City. Without her driver's license for the job, she described her reality: "I'm gonna take whatever job is hiring a three-time felon." So instead of following her interests in mental health, she found herself working the overnight shift cleaning a local fast food restaurant.

Some mothers to adult children also discussed scarce funds within the context of maternal behaviors they hoped to enact in addressing their children's wants and needs, but also as examples to their children by avoiding a return to crime. Though Emma's children were not minors and her children lived together outside of the city, she interpreted her employment difficulties through the lens of motherhood. Her daughters, ages 28 and 30, were both aware of this challenge as they provided their mother with advice to keep her "chin up and don't give up." When asked if her maternal identity influenced any of her decisions post-release, Emma noted that her maternal identity inspired her desire not to succumb to the identity that society had attached to her as a robber. Despite feeling weighed down with tons of difficulties, Emma believed:

I can be an example to just don't give up. No matter how many opportunities close. You don't have to be what people say even if you're not. "Oh you say I'm a robber,

so I'ma rob." I'm not gonna be that. I'm not gonna be what people say I am. I'm still gonna be a powerful example for my children.

Though her children were self-sufficient, she still focused on the salience of her maternal identity. This encouraged her to avoid returning to crime to meet her financial needs; instead, she emphasized being a positive example as a mother. Thus, even less dependent children continued to serve as motivators for mothers to refrain from turning to illegitimate means in the midst of all the financial difficulties they faced.

Rashida had three adult children: two sons (ages 18 and 29) and one 22-year-old daughter. As Rashida explained, "My daughter was struggling with where she lives at right now; the apartment, there were a lot of difficulties with it. I feel like she wouldn't be in that condition if we was all under one roof." This took an emotional toll on Rashida, as she blamed herself for her daughter's living conditions believing that with a better financial situation, she could have protected her daughter from this experience. Rashida considered her finances the greatest challenge she faced as a mother since her release:

I won't be able to help *anybody* and that bothers me *a lot*.... But they tell me not to worry about it: "Ma, you can't. We know you gave us everything blah blah blah." My son, he wants things and I think he deserves it. Not only deserves it, but earned it.

Like Rashida, mothers often believed their children merited particular attention and assistance given their previous experiences with maternal incarceration. While support is a commonly described maternal role, the formerly incarcerated mothers regarded their support as a way to offset previous disappointments and as reassurance to their children that they were making constructive changes post-incarceration.

Yet, when their adult children were even older in age—especially those with families of their own—the participants' maternal identities appeared to be less prominent in their discussions of financial and occupational interests and decision-making. For

example, Henrietta was 62 years old and had three children ages 25, 32, and 43. Of her three adult children, her eldest child and middle child both had their own families with two to three children each. Like most of the participants, Henrietta had an interest in obtaining employment but she did not discuss her interests in regards to maternal responsibilities. Instead, she was interested in working as a way to “keep going” and remain active: “I got a lot of time on my hands.... I’m at a point in *my* life where my kids are grown. I’ve seen them grow up. They having their own kids....I’m driving myself crazy not doing anything.” Lucinda was another mother with three adult children ages 29, 25, and 35. Though she was unemployed at the time of her interview, she was receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Her discussions of employment and finances emphasized her reluctance to seek employment due to risks of losing SSI benefits: “I can’t risk being cut off at this time because of a job, you know what I’m saying? They say you can work a certain amount of hours, but some people have problems with that too.”

I found it particularly striking that during my discussions with mothers who did not have contact, such children were excluded from their discussions of work and finances. This was the case for the two women who did not have contact with their only child – Jesenia and Laura. Jesenia, for instance, was seeking employment at the time of her interview and her discussions centered on her search for “anything and everything” that was available in order to “save up.” Laura, however, was employed as a peer educator at a local New York City hospital. Her discussions of employment focused on the pleasure she felt in “caring for people” as a peer educator. Even though she was discontent with her low income, her interest in better pay was not associated with

maternal responsibilities but, instead, was motivated by her desire to receive pay that was comparable to her pre-incarceration income. Thus, both women who did not have contact with their only child made no mention of their children or maternal identities as work-related incentives, but directed their discussions merely to individual interests in monetary gain.

During discussions of financial and work-related decisions, mothers with multiple children did not reference children without contact but, instead, directed attention to other children. For instance, like many of the other mothers, Emily noted: “When I came out, I wanted to get a job and take care of my kid.” Here, she refers to only one child even though she had three children at the time of her release. As she described her expectations, it became apparent that her attention was focused on obtaining a job in order to support the one child who had lived with her prior to her incarceration. This was also the only child among her three children with whom she remained in contact. She associated “something to take care of” with having a “purpose” in life; this relationship with just one of her children gave her that sense of purpose. Yet, seven years after her release, her son was 24 and living with his wife and newborn baby, but her expectations never came to reality: “I didn't get a job. I have a B-felony, so it was hard for me to get a job. It still is.... Right now, I just want a job so bad. I mean, I wouldn't care if I was making minimum wage. Just a job.” Josefina was another mother who had five children. Of them, she did not have contact with her youngest two sons (ages 10 and 15), she lived separately from her daughters (ages 22 and 26), and she lived with her 20-year-old son. Even though Josefina was one of the eight participants that were employed at the time of their interview, she still described finances as “the only big challenge I have.” Thus, in

addition to working on the books at a balloon company, she was also working off the books in order to supplement her income. As she noted: “I have to worry about my son.” Yet, there was no mention of her other children regarding work-related decisions or finances.

These accounts speak to the prominence of the maternal identity, including the emotional impact on mothers when financial burdens affected their performance of maternal behaviors. The mothers I spoke to often understood their maternal identities as grounded in the ability to provide for their children and/or serve as role models in some way. Maternal identities were especially salient among women whose children were younger and when they had contact with at least one of their children. In some cases, mothers’ concerns were not only driven by their personal desires to support their children, but also from expectations placed on them by their under-aged children. When these women experienced maternal role strains associated with their financial ability to meet their children’s wants or needs, this at times heightened distress (see Simon, 1992). Mothers with adult children also discussed scarce funds within the context of maternal behaviors albeit with the caveat that their adult children were still relatively dependent (or in financial need) and the mothers were trying to serve as role models through their actions during financial difficulties. When their children were much older and dependent, however, the women’s maternal identities were less prominent in their discussions of financial and occupational decision-making. This demonstrates various nuances in navigating motherhood post-incarceration but also demonstrates how the role of motherhood in women’s reintegration may differ depending on a number of factors.

### **The Salience of the Maternal Identity through Unemployment**

Of the 37 participants, over two-thirds were unemployed at the time of their interview and, of them, seven were unemployed while living with minor children. As previously demonstrated, mothers often described maternal desires to obtain employment as a means to support their children. Yet, for at least two of the seven unemployed mothers that were living with minor children, their *unemployment* was understood through a positive lens, as it allowed them to spend time with their children. It is important to note, however, that this discussion was not common among the mothers as a whole, possibly since most mothers lived separately from their children and unemployment does not necessarily guarantee more interaction with those children living elsewhere.

After being incarcerated and away from their children, these mothers believed unemployment provided them the opportunity to perform behaviors associated with their maternal identity, despite financial burdens. Interestingly, they framed their discussion of unemployment with reference to what is meant to be a “good” mother. For instance, when asked about the difference between a “good” and “bad” mother, Makayla discussed the importance of “attention with your kid” and “doing things with your kid” even when you do not have “everything or anything.” The week before her interview, she left her job at a local supermarket where she had worked for the two years since her release. She was exposed to sexually inappropriate suggestions from her employer who also penalized her severely (e.g., sending her home and mandating overtime) when she needed to attend to parental duties. She also discussed a prior job in which she had to work late, return home to her son, and end her days feeling exhausted and stressed out:

That’s not healthy for me and I have to go home and be a mother to my kid. I cannot be stressed by this job that you ain’t paying me nothing, to go home and then I’m mad

from what you're doing and I gotta go home and then my son does something, I'm screaming at him. But it's all gonna rem from what are you doing at work. No.... I rather stay home and be poor and raise my son and find a way how we gonna eat and stuff.

However, having recently quit her job, Makayla also noted that because she was unemployed, she was able to spend more time with her only child, who she also lived with in housing provided by a reentry program. She described having more time to “help him out with his school,” to “discuss more” with him, to be “more relaxed” at the end of her day, and to create “positive memories.” This time spent with her son was something particularly special and important for her as a mother after spending two years incarcerated.

Even though Ana was seeking employment at the time of her interview, her experiences in the criminal justice system made her value the time that she was able to spend with her three children while she was unemployed. First incarcerated at 19 years old under the Rockefeller Drug Laws, Ana lived in Puerto Rico for a few years after she was released on parole. Ana believed her term under parole was complete before she moved. Years later, to her surprise, she learned during a traffic stop that there was a 12-year-old warrant for her arrest for a parole violation – failure to report. At that point, Ana had three children who were unaware that she had been incarcerated years earlier. They learned of it when she was re-incarcerated for approximately 7 months because of this technical violation. During the 18 years between her first and second incarcerations, Ana was working two jobs as a single parent and found herself postponing quality time with her children in order to work – a priority that shifted after her incarceration:

I used to love working, but I took it for granted. I just was like, "Okay, we'll do this next week. We'll do this next week." And now I realize that you can't always wait for next week. You take that moment and, you know, that moment could be your last.

You know, if your kids wanna go out hiking with you, go out, change your plans. Spend as much time as you can with them, you know. Work, it will be there. You don't have to overcompensate by work.

Thus, even though she was seeking employment, Ana's last incarceration made her realize that the time spent with her children was more valuable than the time spent at work.

When faced with financial barriers like unemployment, both Ana and Makayla found ways to reframe these negatives by focusing on the maternal value they derived from time spent with their children. Specifically, the narratives presented here demonstrate how mothers were able to enact maternal behaviors during unemployment according to their understanding of what mothering entails – such as spending time, communicating more, being more relaxed in their company, helping with homework. These were behaviors they were able to enact, potentially providing them with some sense of control and meaning within unsatisfactory financial situations (see Burke & Stets, 1999; Stryker & Burke, 2000).

### **Seeking and Sustaining Suitable Employment as Mothers**

While many of the mothers I spoke with had the goal of providing financially for their children, they also faced obstacles as they sought employment that was specifically conducive to their maternal identity. In discussing potential job opportunities, mothers who had contact with their underage children often reflected on maternal responsibilities that took precedence in their search for employment.

For example, though Tia was unemployed when we spoke, she was seeking employment and described the importance of her potential work schedule. With a 3-month-old baby, she needed to take into consideration daycare hours and daycare



expenses. She had a commercial driver's license (CDL), but it was suspended for six months as a result of her drug-related offense. In order to reinstate her CDL, she needed to pay associated fees, including reinstatement fees. She wondered: "I don't know how they expect you to live." Eventually she found herself on welfare for the first time in her life, but with hopes of returning to work for her previous employer – a private bus company. However, the work hours and pay did not correspond well with having a child, especially a newborn.

They will work you out; you pull out your bus from 4 in the morning and you can't go back until 11 at night .... And they not even paying you. They pay you like \$25 for a trip. Yeah, and when we go to Connecticut, it's \$100. Then, they draw it back out in taxes .... When you give daycare \$100, what's in it for me? .... You're not even gonna get a good schedule to drop your kids to daycare and pick dem up back [*sic*]. The schedule is crazy.

Instead, she preferred to work as a driver for a school bus, which would only require her to work during the weekdays and would allow her eldest three children to continue staying with her during their weekend visits. Because of her felony conviction, however, her hopes for this work arrangement for herself and her children had quickly subsided.

Ana described her ideal work situation as a "family company" in which each of her three children (ages 12, 13, and 21) were involved. She had put some thought into her goal of opening her own business as an event planner, as she described her daughter bringing her creativity to the company, one son managing the events, and the other son driving the company truck. When asked what motivated her to have these plans over the years, she responded: "Having my family together.... I can still be a mom but work and I can see my family grow." In discussing the minimum criteria for the perfect job, she distinguished between a general response and a response as a mother. In general, the minimum criterion is a "good" and "stable" salary in order to provide: "That's always my

concern, always providing. That's always on top of my head. I need to be able to provide for them." Upon describing the minimum criterion as a mother specifically, she described the importance of employers' "understanding that I *am* a mother. Something goes down or goes wrong, I have to be a mom first." Ana's discussion of being a mother "first" demonstrates the salience of the maternal identity over that of an employee even within a prospective workplace environment. This, however, can conflict with ideals of a favorable employee as someone who is willing to make sacrifices for the job (Williams, 2001). In addition, many positions – particularly in the low-wage sector – do not offer sick leave or paid vacation days and do not allow mothers to use work phones for personal use (Edin & Lein, 1997). These work conditions make it difficult for mothers like Ana to put motherhood first, if so desired. As a result of this conflict between maternal desires and opportunity, Edin and Lein (1997, p. 263) argued that "working in the low-wage sector was often not compatible with parenting," as it complicated women's ability to enact motherhood (see also Scott et al., 2004). I, however, would caution against the use of *compatibility* and *incompatibility* when discussing mothering through financial difficulties given that – as shown throughout this chapter – the women I spoke described parenting their children post-incarceration even through low pay and unemployment.

### Conclusion

Having a criminal record further exacerbates the unequal playing field for mothers of African American, Hispanic, and West Indian background. The mothers in this study described a need to work harder than other women and men as a result of society's multifaceted and stigmatized judgments of their character. They felt

“quadruply” disadvantaged in the labor market as minority women, with criminal records, and with other circumstances that counter social norms of womanhood and motherhood.

The study participants I spoke with collectively described obstacles in obtaining employment and managing finances post-incarceration. They believed that others – particularly employers – viewed them narrowly as formerly incarcerated individuals. As a result, the women discussed their efforts to fight against the social labels imposed upon them, such as “felons” or “robbers” or other derogatory terms associated with their involvement in the criminal justice system. In addition, this chapter reveals how African American, Hispanic, and West Indian women saw race and ethnicity playing a role in their labor market and workplace experiences. Interestingly, even though the West Indian participants were more likely to be employed and they had the highest level of education, I did not find racial-ethnic differences in how the women discussed motherhood in relation to their employment or finances. Instead, racial-ethnic differences concerned factors that were peripheral to motherhood, yet still influential in their reintegration process. For instance, they discussed divergent stereotypes of West Indians’ and African Americans’ work ethics that may shape the hiring process in different ways and introduce a tense workplace dynamic. In addition, the participants paralleled West Indians with Hispanics according to familial and ethnic discontent with illegitimate means of financial gain, which affected financial assistance from loved ones. Thus, within this umbrella of racial-ethnic minority women, there were some meaningful differences in the assistance they received from family members and the hurdles they reported in the labor market and workplace.

In addition to the participants' views on the role of race and ethnicity in their experiences, I found meaningful variations in their employment interests that varied by their children's ages and the degree of contact with their children. As illustrated in this chapter, the role of the maternal identity varied among the women in their plans and decisions within the labor market and their experiences in the workplace. Specifically, the maternal identity was less salient in employment plans and decisions for mothers whose children were adults and self-sufficient, especially with families of their own. This was also the case for mothers who did not have contact with their only child, impacting the maternal prominence associated with those specific children. For these two groups of mothers, discussions of employment and finances revolved less around their maternal identity as a motivator in their reintegration; instead they emphasized the need for individual resources to successfully reintegrate post-incarceration. In this way, maternal identity was less salient.

Yet, some mothers with adult children also discussed limited funds within the context of motherhood albeit with the caveat that their adult children were still relatively dependent or mothers were trying to be role models by refraining from crime during these financial difficulties. In addition, mothers with contact with at least one of their children still focused on motherhood by directing their discussions of employment and finances to the children in their lives. For these two groups, a salient maternal identity shaped occupational plans and decisions in their reintegration post-incarceration. Even though maternal identities served as a source of motivation during their reintegration (Leverentz 2014; Michalsen 2011; Sharpe 2015), their employment experiences were often complicated as women tried to meet maternal desires and expectations while

simultaneously battling socio-structural reprimands as formerly incarcerated mothers of color. While some mothers expressed emotional strife in the midst of these complexities, others modified the way they understood their life circumstances post-incarceration, reinforcing their maternal identity in these social situations. Thus, despite their financial obstacles, these mothers discussed narratives of endurance that were nourished by maternal desires, relationships, and interpretations of their financial situations.

In sum, I suggest that consideration is given to how formerly incarcerated mothers balance their efforts and struggles in the labor market and workplace, with special attention to maternal responsibilities and interests. This chapter not only demonstrates the role motherhood may have in women's post-incarceration employment and finances, but it also highlights how these reentry experiences are further shaped by their racial-ethnic background, their children's ages and independence, and the degree of contact with their children.

CHAPTER 6

BALANCING RECOVERY AND MATERNAL BEHAVIORS POST-  
INCARCERATION: MOTIVATIONS, MANAGEMENT, AND SOCIAL  
RESPONSIBILITIES IN RECOVERY EFFORTS

Vera is a woman of African American and Crucian background. As a child, her family used to throw parties that included alcohol. After the parties ended for the night, Vera was asked to clean the tables. Here and there, Vera would take little sips of alcohol that was openly available at the end of the parties. One day, she found a bottle of Jamaican rum and she fell “in love” with alcohol consumption. At 11 years old, she was exposed to alcohol use as her “first” and “main controlling substance.” Her alcohol use then progressed to smoking weed, which she referred to as the “funny cigarettes.” Vera would smoke the “funny cigarettes” recreationally, usually on the weekends. From smoking “funny cigarettes,” Vera then transitioned to smoking the “funny joints.” This was weed mixed with crack cocaine. She was able to do the “funny joints” for about 18 years as she enjoyed the feeling and was still able to manage everyday life, like “keep a job” and care for her daughter and son. However, this all changed when she “graduated” to using crack cocaine in her 30s. She describes crack cocaine as “the worst thing” and the cause of her downfall: “once we went from the ‘funny joint,’ we went down.” Vera became addicted to crack cocaine and found herself in trouble with the law in numerous occasions, all sparking from the physical need to continue her use and finding ways to support her addiction. “It was just about survival, and I had to survive.” Eventually, Vera was jailed for approximately eight months before being placed in a residential drug treatment program where she stayed for about three years before her release on parole.

As with Vera, addiction histories were common among my study participants. In fact, 70% had histories of addiction to drugs, alcohol, or – as described by one mother – money.<sup>1</sup> The most common addiction, however, was to cocaine; 15 mothers (41%) had histories of cocaine use, including both powder and crack cocaine. Women were also addicted to heroin, alcohol, and other drugs like methamphetamine and prescription painkillers, in addition to the one woman with a money addiction. Although five women described having previous addictions to drugs, they did not disclose their prior drug(s) of choice. Of the women with histories of addiction, 81% described these as leading to more nonviolent offending behaviors that resulted in their incarcerations. Thus, their reintegration and desistance from crime is largely dependent on their ability to manage these addictions.

Vera was 45 years old and had used drugs for about 30 years of her life. At the time of her interview, however, she was proud to be clean. In fact, the birth of her granddaughter was a major source of motivation to make constructive changes in her life and remain drug-free. When I spoke with her, she was thrilled with being in recovery for approximately 4 years and having an established relationship with her granddaughter as “Gammy.” Over the years, Vera cautioned her children that there is no manual to motherhood. Even through previous experiences with addiction and incarceration, Vera described loving the way her son (age 22) and daughter (age 25) viewed her as a mother and commended her for remaining drug-free after so many years using controlled

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter not only includes mothers with histories of addiction to drugs or alcohol, but also includes one mother with a self-diagnosed money addiction. This money addiction is included here since it was equated to drugs and alcohol given the “high” she received from getting money and the physical symptoms of withdrawal when she was unable to “get over” on local businesses or organizations.

substances. These were the most rewarding moments for her as a formerly incarcerated mother – changing her life around and being told by her children that they were proud of her recovery.

### **The Desire to Recover**

Given the presence of addiction histories in the lives of formerly incarcerated mothers, it is no surprise that recovery was a common topic of discussion among study participants. Scholars argue that in order for change to be initiated, a crucial preliminary component is an *openness* to change (see Giordano et al., 2002). While the mothers described various motivating factors in their openness to initiate recovery efforts, this section specifically highlights their narratives as it relates to their maternal identity. By highlighting their maternal aims associated with recovery, I hope to deviate from common generic discussions of post-incarceration recovery and draw further attention to the role of maternal identities in women's experiences. Consistent with some existing research (Stenius et al., 2005; see also Ferraro & Moe, 2003; Hardesty & Black, 1999), I found that women's negotiation of motherhood often encouraged mothers to seek sobriety.

### **The Effect on Children**

Even though mothers described their incarceration as a time in which they began to work on their sobriety, this transition to recovery was not described as a direct result of the correctional setting and punishment itself because, as Qiana explained, “you can still be able to do drugs in prison.” Rather, recovery was characterized as resulting from cognitive transformations regarding their behaviors and its impact on their children. As these mothers explained their desires to recover from histories of addiction, they often



mentioned the previous effect of their addictions on their children, but also the effect that a potential relapse would have on them.

Carolina described being in and out of the criminal justice system prior to motherhood when she had “nothing to worry about,” but said the effect of her addiction and associated incarceration was “totally different” once she was a mother:

I didn't have any responsibility like as far as children; it was only me and it was all I knew....Now, I have things to worry about because I have these two children....[W]ith this last incarceration, leaving the kids behind is like totally different, you know. It's like I could say today, "I don't ever want to go back to prison" – which I never said that before. I never said, "I won't ever use drugs." I see that now so it's, it's different. It's very different.

Once incarcerated as a mother, she returned to the community without custody of her two minor children, who had been placed in foster care. The physical separation from her children motivated her to address the circumstances that started with her addiction and led to her incarceration. Even though she was able to visit her children, Carolina was motivated to go into recovery and remain sober in order to prevent “leaving the kids behind” again and regain custody of her children, which she believed was her obligation as their mother.

Mothers were also motivated in their recovery efforts as a means to weaken the negative effects on their under-aged children, who were dependent and also increasingly aware of their presence and addictive behaviors (or the lack thereof). Like half of women offenders (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999), Qiana was under the influence when she committed her crime. She was charged and incarcerated for arson, then released on five years of parole. However, after violating parole for a technical violation one year after her release, she found herself incarcerated again for a year. By the time of her interview, Qiana had undergone a cognitive transformation in that she was able to recognize and understand

the detrimental effect of her previous actions on her developing six-year-old son – an understanding she said she did not previously hold at her initial arrest and incarceration when her son was only one:

[I]t's affecting him, you know, and I hate to say it: after I became- after I got locked up for this violation, that's when I noticed it was affecting him....I think the first time I became incarcerated, like me being away from him mattered but not as much because he didn't know. So it really, in a way, didn't affect me but now – due to the fact he's older and he knows – me using is not an option, you know. Because knowing: the decisions that I've had made under the influence are detrimental.

Qiana noted that there were a number of things she now considered instrumental in her recovery efforts, such as “thinking of [her]self as a mother and ready to be a mother.” She believed this thought-process had been beneficial for her. Qiana had been in recovery for a year at the time of her interview, and felt it was “not an issue” any longer given her newfound understanding of how a potential relapse could affect her, affect her relationship with her son, and lead to overall negative outcomes.

Mothers were also motivated to remain sober in order to build trust and enhance mother-child relationships by meeting their children's requests or mending the negative effects of previously broken promises. As described by Emily: “I kept saying: ‘If I do this, I'm gonna mess up everything, you know, my son's trust.’ That's all he kept saying: ‘Please, mommy, don't do that no more. Please, I don't want to see you like that no more.’ And I always thought about that.” Karen was another mother who admitted to previously breaking numerous promises, since her use of crack cocaine interfered with her ability to attend her daughter's affairs. Karen described her previous relationship with her daughter as being “shaky” while using, but was motivated to “keep doing the right *things*” with hopes that their mother-daughter relationship would “get better with time.”

In sum, the above accounts demonstrate how conflicts between maternal ideals and previous enactments of motherhood often influenced mothers' desires to initiate recovery efforts as a means to offset the previous negative effects of addictions.

### **Individual Changes in Recovery with Children in Mind**

Who did mothers do recovery for – themselves or their children? This was a common, yet unexpected, theme that arose during the interviews: whether mothers were embarking in their recovery efforts for personal interests in helping themselves or for the interests of their children. The narratives presented below demonstrate how the women's maternal identities shaped their recovery efforts. While the mothers' actions were not much different from each other, they revealed slightly varying interpretations of the process by which this occurred.

Some mothers specifically stated that their attempts at recovery were made in the name of their children first and for personal reasons second. These mothers would make comments, like those of Emily, "Everything I'm doing: 'My son. My son. My son.' Everything was for my son." Yet, they acknowledged that to "do it" for your children, first entails working on yourself. For instance, Natalie argued:

You gotta be serious first 'cause if you not, it doesn't even matter if you doing it for your kids. 'Cause everybody be like, "Oh, I'm doing this for my kids." You can't do it for them 'cause you won't feel like doing it. If you not ready to do it, it's not gonna work – it's not gonna work at all and you gonna keep doing the same thing.

Like Natalie, other mothers argued that they needed to "do" recovery for themselves first. As Priscilla illustrated: "I'm really working on my sobriety and I've realized that my sobriety is most important. If I don't work on my sobriety, I will relapse and if I relapse, everything will go to hell, like, my kids, everything – everything goes, everything." As explained by Jesenia, mothers with histories of addiction must do whatever it takes to

help themselves remain sober because “the more you benefit yourself, the more you’re gonna be able to benefit your child.” Jesenia described coming to the realization that:

[D]rug *is* the addiction, drug *is* the problem, drug *is* the reason why I’ve been acting this way. I can’t do this no more. I can’t keep chasing the next one. I can’t keep wondering where I’m gonna *get* the next one. ‘Cause the more I’m doing that, the more I’m going away from my son. I can’t do this no more. And... that was when I fully surrendered and I said, “You know what? I need outpatient.”

Though the women described “doing” recovery for themselves or “doing” recovery for their children, the processes involved in their recovery efforts were similar. Specifically, they understood that an internal change for recovery needed to come first in order to enhance their maternal relationships and support their children as desired. Thus, regardless of whom they were “doing it” for, they each were tasked with working on themselves first. The mothers hoped to make constructive changes in themselves that would then ultimately benefit their children and mother-child relationships. They also believed that potential relapses led to more problems like unfavorable circumstances for their children and undesirable conditions in mother-child relationships, pushing them to maintain sobriety as a means of navigating motherhood.

### **Navigating Motherhood and Managing Recovery as Mothers**

While motherhood often encouraged mothers to maintain sobriety, the combination of general post-incarceration obstacles and maternal complications, at times, introduced additional hurdles for women with children. For some mothers, the navigation of motherhood while managing recovery was able to “ground them” but for others “it may spiral ‘em out of control.” The following elaborates on mothers’ experiences attempting to engage with their maternal identities while working on recovery efforts.

### **Coping with Stresses of Reentry While Navigating Maternal Contact and Accountability**

It is widely accepted in research that drug use often functions as a coping mechanism and life's stresses may be common triggers for relapse among individuals with histories of addiction (see Baunach, 1985; Dunlap, 1992). Thus, it was no surprise that mothers' ability to manage recovery was dependent on coping with the stresses of reentry such as meeting the requirements of post-release supervision, obtaining employment, finding suitable housing, and regaining custody of children – to name a few. For instance, Wyndolyn explained that it was “hard” to be in recovery given that “you’re up against so many angles even with children, family members, society – period. You up against a lot.” As part of the recovery process, she and others learned that instead of “stashing” or “medicating” their emotions away like previously done, they needed to deal with their emotions without the drugs, alcohol, or money at the root of their addictions. These efforts were particularly difficult when they were in the early stages of recovery and still learning how to constructively cope with stresses. When asked how she would describe her experience as a mother in recovery, Emily said: “In the beginning, it’s hard ‘cause every little thing triggers you.” When they were still establishing alternative coping mechanisms, women deemed the early stages of recovery the most vulnerable times for potential relapse.

Though the mothers in my study faced great difficulty in the beginning phases of their recovery, the degree of maternal contact was also a crucial factor in understanding their experiences managing recovery and reintegration. This was particularly true for those who did not have contact with their children as well as those who had diminished contact with their children that did not live with them. For instance, Odessa was overwhelmed with difficulties at the time of her interview. She felt as though she had no

control over numerous aspects of her life, despite her desire and attempts to make some improvements in her circumstances post-incarceration. In addition to this, Odessa did not live with her 15-year-old son, and she demonstrated extreme anger at her son's father for the physical and emotional distance in the mother-child relationship. This limited relationship with her son further contributed to her indifference in meeting parole requirements: "It's like I don't really wanna go to jail, but it's almost like I really don't care. I kind of feel like that sometimes....I don't really care about anything. Like, sometimes I feel empty. Like it doesn't matter. Like nothing matters." When asked what could help her, Odessa responded that it would be "nice" if she were connected with her only child. She believed that the weak relationship with her son contributed to her feelings of being "disconnected" and withdrawn in other aspects of her life post-incarceration, tempting her to relapse.

Unlike Odessa, Laura described her addiction as being well behind her and in the past. Laura still struggled, however, to rebuild a relationship with her 20-year-old daughter, who was taken from her custody at a young age and had no communication at the time of Laura's interview: "I don't know if I can make it up, but to make a relationship with her and for her to be able to forgive me. I mean, I'm here now in whole." While Laura expressed a desire to recover her maternal role and explained the existing problems in doing so, she did not believe this conflict could negatively impact her recovery or trigger her relapse. It is possible that she perceived less risk of relapse associated with identity conflict due to the longer time she spent in recovery, but it is also likely motherhood was less salient in her everyday life, as she had no contact with her 20-year-old daughter.

The above accounts illustrate that mothers' degree of contact with children may have differential influences on maternal identity conflicts and subsequent recovery efforts. On the one hand, it appears that motherhood is likely less salient in everyday activities when there is no maternal contact, and existing identity conflicts with maternal ideals may have less direct impact managing recovery efforts. On the other hand, it appears that mothers with more communication with their children, and hopes of recovering or enhancing maternal relationships, may be more impaired in recovery efforts by the presence of identity conflicts. In this way, the expectations of maternal accountability were influential in the mothers' experiences. Specifically, mothers were tasked with learning how to help themselves maintain sobriety while simultaneously making efforts to perform maternal behaviors by meeting maternal expectations. This was true for mothers who had contact with at least one of their children, and particularly true for mothers who lived with at least one of their children. As expressed by Onika, who lived with her 20-year-old daughter: "Sometimes it's hard being in recovery and being a mother because we have to deal with the struggles of life, period, and then now we dealing with the reality of now we have to sit down and take time for somebody else when we just trying to get our own life in order." When asked how she would describe her experience as a mother in recovery, Priscilla responded that it was "challenging" learning how to cope with her emotions. This was particularly the case when she found herself "frustrated with my own children." Even though it was "not easy" for her, she described eventually learning coping mechanisms for her emotions and learning how to control her anger and conceal her frustration from her children.

### **Educating Children and Preventing a Generational Cycle**

Even though the mothers in my study described efforts to conceal their addictions from their children, the children were often still aware of the addictions and changes in their mothers' behavior. Whether they were fully aware of their mothers' addictions or merely felt its impact (for instance, by maternal incarceration), the mothers reported that they tried to educate their children about the harms of addiction once they, themselves, were in recovery. This undertaking was an attempt to prevent a generational cycle of addiction and further wrongdoing that might lead their children to incarceration.

Mothers with younger children were more likely to describe their efforts (and dilemmas) to answer their children's questions about addiction and educate them about the harms of addiction, including by explaining its previous impact on them. Carolina explained that her biggest concerns were the questions her seven-year-old daughter was asking her regarding drugs.

CAROLINA: She has asked me, "What are drugs?" You know? And she's coming up with questions I don't have the answers to, you know. And I'm like, "Well, that's something you can't do." You know, that's all I can say. I didn't know— And then, I lit up a cigarette and she's like, "You're doing drugs." And I'm like, wow, I kept— You know?

JG: What do you think made her ask that question?

CAROLINA: I don't know and that's something I was talking to my therapist about. Like, where did she come up with that and why she's asking me? Did she hear this conversation from mommy doing drugs somewhere else and she came to me with the question? I'm wondering where that question came from for a 7-year-old. She's doing homework and she just popped out with that question.

Carolina noted that she "absolutely" spoke with her therapist about her daughter's inquiries, believing her daughter would ask about drugs again.

CAROLINA: What [the therapist] told me was like, "Well, you tell her: 'There's 2 kind of drugs: there's good drugs and there's bad drugs. The



good drugs is your medicine for when you have a cold (and this and that). And the bad drugs—” She said to tell her: “It’s something that mommy did and mommy made a mistake and now mommy knows it’s wrong. And that’s what led mommy to leave you, but mommy is working on that problem.” That’s what the therapist told me to tell her. So, I don’t know when she asks if I’m sick – I don’t know – but that’s what the therapist said I should say. But, she said not to ignore the question because it’s not good.

JG: How do you feel about what the therapist suggested on how to respond? Do you agree with it?

CAROLINA: Half and half. I’m just– I don’t know. Like, I don’t want to tell my daughter: “Mommy did drugs.” I’m a little ashamed, you know what I mean? *Buuut*, see, I shouldn’t lie to her either. Like, that’s what caused the separation: “Mommy made [a] bad decision and this is what happens when you do drugs.”

Carolina admitted that she did not know how her daughter would respond upon explaining the bad decisions she previously made using drugs. Yet, working to regain custody of her two children, Carolina had hopes of them going to therapy together.

When asked what has been the greatest challenge she faced as a mother since her release, Jesenia, who had a five-year-old son, responded:

The greatest challenge for me was actually communicating with my child and actually being able to explain to him that: “What mommy did wasn’t right, and that mommy’s sick, and mommy’s trying to get better, and: you don’t do this, you don’t smoke this, you don’t drink this because this, this, and this is gonna happen.”

In addition to the difficulty in explaining her past mistake with drug use and educating her son about the dangers of consistent drug and alcohol use, Jesenia found it more difficult given that her son was being exposed to drug use from his father while he was under the custody of his paternal grandmother.

[H]e’s having difficulty understanding that [my drug use wasn’t right] because his father is doing just that. So, it’s like: “Mommy, why can’t you do it and you not with me? And daddy can do it and he’s with me?” I said, “Cause daddy does it when nobody’s looking and that’s not right. That’s not a good thing. But you don’t tell him that because you’re his son. You just understand that daddy’s ill and has issues, and

daddy doesn't know how to get through that whereas mommy's getting the treatment that she needs."

Even though Jesenia found this communication with her only son to be the greatest challenge she faced in reentry, she also found consolation in his comforting response: "“Okay, so I'm gonna see you soon. And don't worry mommy. God got you. I be right here. I'm not going nowhere.”" This remained true even though Jesenia had no communication with her son in the four months leading up to her interview.

While formerly incarcerated mothers in recovery made attempts to prevent generational cycles, the mothers' efforts weren't always received with kindness from their older children and they weren't always successful. For instance, Priscilla described that her second son, a teenager, had started drinking and smoking weed. She confronted her son about his alcohol use as he entered their home smelling of alcohol. Priscilla proclaimed that he would not enter their home drunk, noting that she had become "over protective of him" because she refused to "lose him to the street." While Priscilla did not want her son going down the destructive path she had previously taken, she found it challenging to enact mothering while in recovery. Specifically, in trying to prevent her child from alcohol abuse and a possible downward spiral, Priscilla's son responded that her previous drug addiction was being comparatively worse than his alcohol use. Priscilla's response to her son's insult was: "I left it alone. I went into a corner, you know, I went to my own room and I cried my eyes out because...the truth hurts." Like Priscilla, other mothers I interviewed also experienced such conflicts between their ideal maternal identities and their ability to enact perceived maternal roles when their children displayed a behavioral pushback and followed their footsteps into substance use.

Given the efforts to prevent a generational cycle and the difficulties that sometimes arose when attempting to accomplish this, it was no surprise that mothers described feeling proud when their children did not follow in their footsteps of addiction or incarceration. Bernadette was a mother of six children between the ages of 26 and 44 at the time of her interview. She described being “very grateful” that none of her children followed her path into cocaine use or other drug addiction: “Nobody followed my path, and that’s a blessing. None of them use drugs....I’m the only one that did that...I’m very grateful.” Karen was a mother of two who, like Bernadette, also had a previous addiction to cocaine. As she explained, “my kids don’t drink, they don’t smoke, they don’t do nothing. So, if, if that’s what’s keeping them from not using – seeing me – I would do it all over again ‘cause my kids are good. They [are] good young adults. I’m proud of them.” Karen attributed her children’s aversion to drugs and alcohol to her history with addiction, believing there was a possibility that something positive came from a negative experience. This sentiment was shared by Latoya – a mother to two children (ages 18 and 14) with a history of money addiction that ultimately led to her incarceration. Latoya believed: “I don’t ever have to worry about [my children] breaking the law to get nice things ‘cause they know what the price is. They know what the price is, and they’re not willing to pay that price. Nothing is that important to them.” Like Karen, Latoya believed her children’s experience with her addiction and its negative consequences shaped their aversion to crime. Mothers’ knowledge that their children had not fallen victim to the same problems they had faced appeared to boost their self-esteem as mothers and reinforce their maternal identities. Specifically, knowing that their previous addictions did not lead to a generational cycle of destructive addictive behaviors allowed the

mothers to believe they must have done something right as mothers because their children were, in essence, okay and on the right path.

### **Acknowledgement and Reinforcement in Maternal Recovery**

Although the mothers noted that being a mother in recovery was “not easy,” they also noted the minor acknowledgements of their progress and other aspects of positive reinforcement that they received from their children even during the difficult times. As Priscilla explained: “It’s not easy but when I feel [my youngest son’s] little hands wrap me around my stomach and be like, ‘Mommy, I love you,’ it’s like all worth it, you know, I couldn’t ask for nothing better.” Emily expressed that even though the process was difficult, “it felt good” to be in recovery as she no longer had to worry about her son seeing her sick from yearnings. Mothers also received verbal praise from their children when they recognized the progress made in their recovery. Vera, for instance, described her adult son as being there through the whole process of transitioning from a period of addiction to a state of recovery in which she was “looking better and more healthier and more happier.” She said her two children, who were in their twenties at the time of the interview, were both proud of her progress over time and Vera believed they viewed her differently and more positively as a result. This had a positive effect on her as she was pleased with how far she had come after an addiction that spanned approximately 30 years, and it encouraged her to continue in her recovery efforts: “[O]nce I learned how to live life again – again – sober, there’s no turning back. There’s no turning back. No. There’s no question or a doubt. I love this life. I love where I am.” As summarized by Marcia: “the kids wanna see their mothers doing best. So when the kid is proud of they mother getting they life together, that makes the mother achieve more.”

The above accounts demonstrate how positive actions and remarks from their children can reinforce the mothers' recovery efforts by way of reinforcing their maternal identities. This is particularly so as formerly incarcerated mothers in recovery often encounter difficulties navigating motherhood and must sometimes prove themselves to their children by way of their recovery progress. Thus, positive reinforcements functioned as a demonstration of progress towards meeting personal ideals of mothering and enacting a salient maternal identity. As McIvor (2016, p. 168) notes, children "offer a strong incentive for not resuming drug use and associated offending (i.e., supporting secondary desistance) perhaps because of the associated threats to their identity as mothers that such behaviors – and official responses to it – might present." Marcia argued that specifically because of the obstacles in their lives, sometimes women in recovery "end up becoming the best moms." She also noted that she knew numerous women in recovery who had "become the best moms," playing "major roles" in the lives of their children – including herself.

### **Social Responsibility in Recovery**

The previous section examined the mothers' experiences managing recovery while navigating motherhood; this section, however, demonstrates how their efforts at recovery were also shaped by social interactions beyond mother-child relationships. While recovery entails a change in individual choices, there are also social responsibilities in the mothers' experiences with recovering from their addictions beyond those to their children. Specifically, mothers' recovery efforts were both positively and negatively influenced by social interactions with other individuals. The following elaborates on the complexities of social support networks for formerly incarcerated

mothers in recovery, then explores people's role as common threats to the mothers' recovery.

### **The Complexities of Social Support Networks**

As I found in previous work (Garcia, 2016a), positive individuals in the lives of formerly incarcerated women may serve as facilitators of change by providing different perspectives on otherwise detrimental circumstances and also by helping women cope with negative feelings, temptations of addiction, and social situations. These relationships are beneficial given their nonjudgmental and unconditional nature, which reinforces an understanding among formerly incarcerated women that they are not bad individuals but simply made bad decisions (Garcia, 2016a). This allows such women to maintain positive identities, and the same is true for the women in the current study. It was not uncommon that the mothers described feelings of worthlessness when they previously suffered from addictions, making statements such as: "I felt worthless about myself and I felt that I wasn't a good mother." According to the mothers, however, such feelings changed as they began to find a positive social support network. Priscilla described "feeling" again once she had a good network and realized that she was not alone in her maternal obstacles in post-incarceration recovery. A positive support network helped build self-confidence, having an influence on maternal identities. As Priscilla explained: "I started loving myself and realizing that – you know what? – I'm not this bad person that society says I am. And I can change this around if I don't like the situation I'm in. I am in control and I can change this around. And, I did just that." This demonstrates the influence of a positive support network on their self-identification as women who were not inherently bad people, which further encouraged the mothers in their recovery.

Some formerly incarcerated mothers, however, did not have access to a positive social support network in their recovery efforts. As Bui and Morash (2010, p. 18) note: “other women who are just as motivated or determined to avoid drugs and crime might not be able to form such network relationships, or might have needs that cannot be met through any existing community networks.” Some formerly incarcerated mothers found that the individuals who served as a positive support network at the time of their interview had been negative influences for them in the past, or were subject to their own array of obstacles in reentry or recovery. I will discuss three major aspects of social support: the family, intimate partners, as well as the clients and personnel of both larger reentry programs and more specific drug treatment programs. Though presented separately here, it is important to note that multiple social support networks may shape the women’s experiences and this influence also changed over time.

***The Family.*** Research has shown the role of family networks in shared mothering within the African American, Hispanic, and West Indian community (Bermúdez et al., 2014; Jacobs & Mollborn, 2012; Smith, 1962; Stack & Burton, 1994). For instance, in the current study, family members helped the mothers by providing housing and care for their children during previous addictions. This was likely to continue into recovery as the mothers became better situated in their reintegration post-incarceration. Karen believed her family members were “all right” towards her during her incarceration, which was due to charges of drug possession, and they remained this way upon her release. She later elaborated on why, noting that her family understood drugs had been a long-standing sickness she was faced with: “This is like a history; it’s like they dealt with it, they didn’t scream on me or nothing like that. It’s a disease.” Her family’s view of her addiction as a

disease appears to have shaped a supportive approach to her recovery efforts after her incarceration.

While family support was crucial during previous addictions and during present recovery efforts, it is important to note that familial support did not come without its own adjustments to the women's previous addictions. For instance, the mothers' addiction histories sometimes put a strain on familial relationships. As Onika explained:

I always been close to my mom. It's just the drugs that had a strain, and now that I got my life together, she's back my friend. She's always been my friend. My mother never, never turned her back on me; in spite of whatever I was doing, my mother was there. But, she was from a distance because she couldn't take seeing me, you know, messed up. But, she was there – her and my dad.

This account demonstrates how some family members remained accessible and were willing to help the mothers during times of need.

The strains in familial relationships, however, were sometimes sufficient enough to hinder the extent of support the mothers received. At times, families' hesitation to believe the women had really changed or to believe the women were even capable of such recovery made them less supportive. For instance, Laura described her family being "skeptical" that she would ever get better from her alcohol addiction because, as she described, she was in "such bad shape for so long." In other words, family's perceptions of the women's addiction shaped their level of assistance in the women's recovery efforts: family members who believed addiction was a disease appeared to be more supportive. Family members who believed there were little chances of recovery were less likely to aid in the women's recovery; yet, this only further limited the women's access to a source of support.



For some women, family members enabled their previous addictions and were detrimental influences in previous attempts at recovering. Jesenia's father, for example, had previously served as her enabler, encouraging her drug use as he also had a history of addiction. At one point, Jesenia lived with him for two weeks while trying to remain abstinent, but she ran into issues with her father due to "his attitudes and his alcoholism." She learned that it was not in her best interest to reside with another individual still suffering from addiction – even though it happened to be her father. Notably, however, when she was asked who played the most vital role in helping her raise her son, she responded:

I think, honestly, my father. My father being able to tell me that: "You know what? You're human, you make mistakes but bottom line is that you're getting better. And I just want you to keep going." That's huge for me, especially considering that he's still active. Like, he was my enabler at one point and now he's like my encouragement....He's like: "...[S]eriously, you're doing good and I don't want you to mess up and I don't want to be the reason you fall short."

Thus, despite his previous role as her enabler, Jesenia's father was also deemed the most helpful person encouraging her to push forward with her relationship with her son, including through her recovery efforts.

***Intimate Partners.***<sup>2</sup> Another aspect of social support includes intimate partners – both those who did not have any past experiences with addiction and those who, themselves, had a history of addiction. Bernadette's children's father did not have a

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<sup>2</sup> Though I anticipated writing more about intimate partners due to the link between intimate partners and women's pathways into offending (Gilfus, 1992; Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2016), the participants' discussions of intimate partners was a relatively smaller aspect in navigating motherhood during reintegration. While I present narratives here about intimate partners as positive or negative influences in women's recovery, my discussion of intimate partners is largely limited to the fathers of the women's children and the impact of their absence on custodial and living arrangements, which can be found in Chapter Seven.

history of addiction. She described his mere presence as beneficial in helping her in the beginning stages of recovery: “He helped me just being there. You know, you have somebody to come home to. It wasn’t like when I leave the program or something: ‘Where am I going now? What I’m gonna do now?’ I would’ve ended up back on drugs.” She believed his gratifying and positive company as someone who was not engaged in drug use contributed to her pull away from drug use. Other women found a positive support network in intimate partners who, like them, were also in recovery. At the time of her interview, Onika had been in recovery for five years and was expecting to marry her fiancé the month after her interview. She had known her fiancé for nearly two decades and he had been in recovery for 17 years. Even though they initially met using drugs together, she described him as her “best friend” and a current positive influence on her as her “rock.” At the time of her interview, Jesenia had a fiancé who was approaching 22 years of recovery. With only 32 days in recovery herself, Jesenia believed her fiancé was instrumental in her recovery efforts. He not only introduced her to Narcotics Anonymous and “working the 12 steps,” but he also provided her with individual attention on healthier coping mechanisms to deal with her emotions. One thing he taught her was: “If the person didn’t make me feel the way I wanted to feel, I could express that in a nice way – not just snap at them and swing at them.” She also credited him with aiding in preventing the transference of her drug addiction to another form of addiction (i.e., a shopping addiction): “I went from drug addiction to shopaholic. So, now he’s trying to teach me little by little how to manage money.”

Though partners may be helpful in recovery efforts, this was not the case when partners placed them in situations that tested their sobriety or when the partners were

actively involved in their own addictions. Some of the women described situations in which they had previously relapsed due to the emotional turmoil they encountered in such unhealthy intimate relationships. When Onika was released 4 years prior to her interview, she learned that her husband had a baby by another woman during her 5-year incarceration. Though she originally tried to make things work with her husband at the time, they separated and she relapsed: “I tried to raise the little girl like she was mine – I couldn’t do it....And when I moved out, I left him and I relapsed.” A few months before her interview, Paloma had relapsed. Even though she did not provide details about her relapse, she did blame it on the father of her 3-year-old son: “That’s why me and my baby’s father not together no more because he’s a bad influence on me.” Another participant, Priscilla, had previously relapsed and was unable to receive the help she needed from her partner who was “getting high” at the time. After she was able to maintain abstinence, Priscilla realized that her previous partner was not “healthy” for her and if they stayed together, she would eventually relapse again. This was enough to distance herself from this particular partner in order to protect her own recovery efforts. In fact, intimate partners had often introduced the women to the source of their addictions or had served as their enablers in their previous addictions. As a result, most women viewed the need to disassociate themselves from previous partners who were not in recovery, who posed a serious threat to their recovery process.

There is also a risk that some individuals may not be supportive to the women during difficulties times, but simply try to take advantage during recovery efforts by entering into their lives merely for sexual interests. Lucinda described a common scenario in which women in the early stages of recovery were taken advantage of:

“How you doin’? My name is Tyrone. You wanna go for some coffee?” All the time, they trynna have sex with ‘em. They trynna– They 13th-steppin’ hard as can be. You know, this poor woman just came out of rehab – a program – don’t have nowhere to stay, so the first thing she think: Mr. Wonderful is here and he’s gonna sweep her off her feet and take her to la la land. And she goes for it. Next thing you know, she back out there using. “What happened to you?” “Girl, that nigga 13th-step me.” And then you all messed up again; you gotta go back into detox. It’s a game! They got some people that just prey on women like that, you know?

Lucinda believed some individuals considered it a “job” to “pry on the weak women who’s five-days clean” – a process she refers to as “13<sup>th</sup>-stepping” and that has been discussed in other work (see Bogart & Pearce, 2003). Though women may be “preyed upon” in various social situations, “13<sup>th</sup>-stepping” is typically used in reference to women in recovery who are in programs such as Alcoholic Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. The interplay of these two factors – intimate partners and treatment programs – leads into the complexities of reentry programs and treatment programs as aspects of social support.

***Reentry and Treatment Programs.*** The participants often discussed the constructive influence of post-incarceration reentry and treatment programs on their recovery efforts. This was deemed true whether or not such programs were inpatient or outpatient, and whether or not the women voluntarily enrolled or the courts mandated their involvement. These programs provided the women with a space to discuss their obstacles, to listen to others with similar experiences, and to see the visual proof that it was possible to make progress in their recovery despite past and potential hurdles. As Marie explained:

It’s the networking with people who have been where I’ve been. The N.A. [Narcotics Anonymous] meetings that I don’t have to go to but I choose to go to. That I have a commitment in and they teach me to have a commitment and hearing the people share that have been through what I’ve been through. People that’s been through where I’ve been through and have gone far, who have said that and have gone far. Who have said

that, you know, their lives are amazing now. And even so, their lives are still bad some days but it's better than that life.

Seeing that progress *is* possible often gave the women hope in their own recovery and facilitated the development of self-confidence.

Women also described program workers' interest in "trying to understand, why do we use?" as another helpful aspect of treatment programs. Jesenia explained that she previously held a mindset that was "all about staying clean," but this changed once she joined a program: "I'm learning that the program isn't just about staying clean; it's about coping mechanisms and learning how to live life on daily terms and learning what the responsibility entails in doing that." Qiana, too, believed successful programs were those that took this approach in attempting to understand the underlying issues the women faced and work with them to "find other ways" and show constructive alternatives for change.

Yet, within women's narratives of successful recovery experiences in treatment programs, discussions of unsuccessful programs also arose. Unsuccessful treatment programs were often attributed to the specific interests of the program and the approach taken by the program personnel. Helping formerly incarcerated women with addiction histories, Rashida explained, is "not one of these 1, 2, 3 things. It's not about statistics. It's not about your fiscal year. It's not about that; it's about the people." According to Rashida, treatment programs that work successfully "show people another way to live." She elaborated: "If you're taking away the way they used to living, what are they gonna do when they return? You gotta give them options: 'You can go to this now.' 'You can go for that now.' 'What do you choose to do?' 'What was your desire?' 'What is your dream?'" These questions were examples of what should be asked when the program is

genuinely invested in helping the mothers make constructive long-term changes in their lives. Yet, as Rashida argued, some program personnel emphasize the mere functioning of the program with a more distanced approach that is less helpful for the women than a personalized approach to individual assistance.

Mothers also believed that assistance varied based on whether the personnel in treatment or reentry programs had personal experiences with addiction as mothers, and thus were able to “relate” to the women’s experiences. For instance, some mothers were offered access to parenting workshops or classes within their reentry programs, but these services were not as helpful when the individuals attempting to provide them with guidance had never been incarcerated or never had an addiction as mothers. Some women believed they received better guidance when the women leading parenting classes “understood more like what [they] go through as parents drugging with children,” as Carolina noted.

In addition to the potentially limited understanding of the obstacles formerly incarcerated mothers face in recovery, as well as the programs’ diminished ability or interest to provide women with the needed individualized attention, the women I interviewed also ran into other issues in their recovery due to doubt from other formerly incarcerated women in reentry programs and from those with addiction histories in shared treatment programs. I will elaborate on this further in a later section.

### **Self-Identification and the Social Constructions of Motherhood**

Though direct attacks at maternal identities were less common while the women were in recovery compared to when they were previously engaged in their addictions, the mothers in my study still encountered undesirable judgments and personal attacks from

members of society due to their pasts. Specifically they encountered detrimental social interactions with others who imposed negative labels on them and who, consequently, assumed mothers' behaviors were associated with these negative labels. According to the women, such alleged flaws as *individuals* were sufficient for them to be considered by society as bad mothers, even when this conflicted with their self-identifications.

Priscilla believed that there were numerous individuals with problems who were automatically stigmatized by society because of a flaw and, like her, were viewed by society as "bad" people. Even though she was 15 months clean at the time of her interview, Priscilla believed she was still stigmatized by society – stigmatization that was attached to a label society imposed upon her even though she does not view herself in the same way. "The stigma is: once an addict, always an addict. You know? Some people admire the courage of someone, you know, in the process of recovery in life. And some people don't; some people look at that person as a junkie even though they go to meetings." While in recovery, Priscilla came to disregard societal perceptions of her and to believe in herself: "I'm not this bad person that society says I am." When asked what she would like to tell society, her response was: "That I'm not a bad mother... That I'm a person that suffers from addiction."

Marie described how the stigma associated with her past addiction was exposed through the biased questions she received from formal agencies like the welfare office. When attempting to apply for welfare, she was asked: "What's your drug of choice?" This question was perceived as having an underlying assumption that she was still engaged in drug use although she had been clean for two years. In fact, "I said, 'Excuse

you? What *was* my drug of choice?” In her response, she corrected the welfare office representative and provided her with a more suitable and objective form of questioning.

Once society perceived these women as having “spoiled identities” (Goffman, 1963) like that of “addict,” it was difficult for the women to disassociate themselves from these imposed labels. Even as they made progress in their recovery and maintained salient identities that were not associated with their previous addictions, like maternal identities, this was often not sufficient to alter the image that society had of them. Not only can this explain potential labels of them as bad individuals in lieu of individuals with problems that require support, but this may also explain judgments of them as bad mothers.

### **Doubt from Others and within Drug Treatment Programs**

Judgment is not limited to members of the public or representatives from formal agencies, but is also found among the larger formerly incarcerated female population and within programs designed to help women overcome addictions. As previously noted, 70% of the mothers I interviewed had some previous history with addiction. Of those *without* histories of addiction, some made small commentary distinguishing themselves from others with addiction histories while others were very vocal about their points of view of women with addiction histories. For instance, Ana distinguished herself, noting that because she did not do drugs she “don’t have to worry” and “don’t even have a problem” with reporting to parole. This comment came with the assumption that those with histories of addiction inevitably *do* have such problems and concerns with reporting. Other mothers, however, were more critical. In fact, Francesca undoubtedly distinguished herself from other women with histories of addiction:



I never done drugs or alcohol. I can't understand these fuckers [laughing] ....  
 [B]elieve me, I learned one thing: drug addicts and alcoholics, they always go back.  
 They can't help it. They just go back .... They'll sell their mothers. They'll sell their  
 own asses. They sell their kids.

Francesca wholeheartedly believed that “there’s no recovery” and “they always go back.”

These accounts can be seen as examples of “defensive othering” (see Schwalbe et al., 2000) in which those without addiction histories try to deflect the stigma they face as formerly incarcerated mothers by describing themselves as different from and better than those with histories of addiction.<sup>3</sup> The assumptions they hold that there is no such thing as lifelong recovery also coincides with some public rhetoric regarding individuals with histories of drug and alcohol addictions (see, for example, Peter D. Hart Research Associates Inc., 1998). Valerie was another woman without a history of addiction and she was amazed at how openly people discussed their drug addictions. She was also troubled by the idea of methadone centers, which are intended as treatment and recovery centers by placing patients on methadone as a way to weaken addictions to opioids like heroin. Despite their intended purpose, Valerie believed methadone centers were a “legal way to let these people get high and the city’s paying for it.” Such perceptions may hinder efforts to assist those in need. In fact, according to a national survey by the Harvard School of Public Health (2006), 66% of adults believe that individuals cannot solve addiction on their own and require assistance, yet as many as 51% oppose an increase in state taxes in order to improve alcohol and drug treatment services.

While perceptions from other formerly incarcerated women may mimic those of the larger public, women in recovery may also experience doubt from others in treatment

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<sup>3</sup> Aiello and McQueeney (2016) found similar “defensive othering” amongst their sample of incarcerated mothers.

programs. When women are recently released from prison and enrolled in a drug treatment program, the question arises: “Is she gonna make it?” As Carolina described, these questions come from the women who have managed some time in recovery.

“Everybody comes – mostly everybody – from prison with a history of this and a history of drugs or whatever. Some make it, some don’t....The ones that’s made it will be like:

‘Will this one make it or she won’t make it?’” Jesenia went into a drug treatment program in order to remain abstinent, but was overwhelmed by verbal “attacks” from other women who had longer time periods in recovery.

I feel like the more you judge a mother for their usage, the more they’re gonna feed into it, the more they’re gonna feel worthless, the more they’re gonna feel like why should they even bother if you gonna judge her anyways....They give up hope, they lose hope. And for me, that’s what it was. I lost the hope because I was getting judged by certain people – not everyone, but certain people with substantial clean time.

Jesenia’s experience demonstrates how assumptions and stigma towards mothers in recovery often contributed to their feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem in their recovery. This judgment and doubt not only injures any self-confidence that may have been present, but also ultimately impacts recovery efforts and other efforts to reintegrate into society.

Qiana was in a particular reentry program for the second time after initially relapsing during her first time in the program. She described some issues within reentry programs that make it exceedingly difficult for women with histories of addiction. For one, while increased surveillance may be intended to protect the women, such “a fine microscope” may instead cause the women to believe the program staff “don’t really trust them or believe in them.” Secondly, constant remarks about the need for abstinence may be intended as constructive reminders but may, instead, be perceived as generic demands

that lack positive reassurance in the women's capabilities to remain in recovery. As

Qiana explained:

[T]hat's actually annoying to hear everybody [say]: "straight and narrow." Okay, I understand. I know that I have to do that. I don't need constant reminders every day because that gets annoying....Like hearing that repetitive, for one, it could go in either a positive way or a negative, you know. Most cases – not gonna lie – it turns out negative. When they constantly, you know, somebody constantly feels like they're being watched and that they're not doing what they have to do or that they don't feel like they're good enough, that's when that person goes downhill.

Qiana warned against the constant reminders of recovery obligations as having a potentially negative impact on women in recovery given that such repetition may translate to persistent surveillance and enduring doubt of their abilities. In fact, she argued that more focus should be given to providing constructive suggestions about what mothers can do, in lieu of the generic demands for them to make progress. She also argued that more programmatic efforts should be made to provide them with positive reinforcements when steps at recovery are made:

[I]f I'm doing something good, at least once in a while like: "Listen, you're doing a good job." You know, I'm not saying all the time but just to let me know that I'm doing what I have to do and it's being *noticed*, and not just the negative 'cause I think people focus on the negative more than they do the positive.

Bui and Morash (2010) argue that self-determination is the element that allows mothers to manage their addictions, with or without involvement in treatment programs. While I have previously shown how reentry and treatment programs can boost mothers' self-confidence and motivation to recover, doubt from others in these programs may attack the very self-confidence that is needed to motivate themselves in their own recovery efforts.

**"It's a Culture Thing"**

There may also be racial-ethnic differences in experiences associated with social responsibility given that mothers of African American, Hispanic, and West Indian descent may experience cultural distinctions in familial acceptance and assistance. Although there is some research that compares native-born with foreign-born individuals and finds lower rates of addiction among the foreign-born (see Escobar et al., 2000; Gilbert, 1987; Vega et al., 1998), I do not make this comparison here given that many of the native-U.S. born women in my sample had social ties to the foreign country of familial origin despite their place of birth. While there were no apparent disparities in the pathways into addiction for the African American, Hispanic and West Indian participants in my study, I found other differences between the three groups. Consistent with other research (see Kleinman & Lukoff, 1978), the West Indian participants in my study were least likely (63%) to describe histories of addiction compared to Hispanics (67%) and African Americans (71%). Likewise, West Indian participants were also less likely than Hispanics and African Americans to describe addiction as a contributing factor in more serious offending behaviors (50% compared with 53% and 62%, respectively). Though the African American participants were most likely to have histories of addiction and to describe addiction as contributing to later offending, their narratives of addiction and recovery did not touch upon culture or ethnic background as factors that shaped their experiences. Interviews with West Indian participants, however, raised two interesting points: concerning their personal experiences with addiction from a cultural perspective, and concerning familial acceptance and assistance towards them and other kin with histories of addiction.

For instance, Marie believed her family's West Indian cultural background played

a prominent role in their response to her addiction, noting their unfamiliarity with and misunderstanding of addiction and of offending behaviors as a whole:

I think culture plays a very big part in...a lot of things that *I* went through too because my family couldn't understand them. They couldn't understand prison, they didn't understand drug addiction....And I said, "Ma, drug addict[ion] has no prejudice, just like prison has no prejudice, you know?"

Jean-Louis et al. (2001) report a similar finding. They found that, among this population, addiction is typically not perceived as an emotional or medical issue but, instead, is culturally considered to be the result of a "curse" placed upon the individual; in addition, family were often "unfamiliar with the process of recovery," leading to further misunderstanding in familial relationships (Jean-Louis, 2001, p. 120). Marie believed that this limited understanding of substance abuse weakened the support she received from family members, hurting efforts at recovery for herself and for other West Indians in similar situations. Marie also noted: "There's a lot of pride that comes with being a West Indian. West Indians carry a lot of pride." Given this sense of pride, such women suggested that a history of addiction was cause for abandonment, more so by those in their home countries. This abandonment of kin with histories of addiction was demonstrated by another West Indian participant, Kerry-Ann. Although she did not have a history of addiction herself, Kerry-Ann noted how her family "discarded" her uncle who had a history of drug abuse, with her own father severing communication with his brother. Interestingly, she laughed in a removed manner as she derogatorily referred to her own uncle as "a crackhead" in diminished concern for his wellbeing.

Despite the common generalization in existing literature that treats West Indians and their experiences under a "Black" racial umbrella, the formerly incarcerated West Indian participants described a uniquely disconnected familial response towards kin with

histories of addiction. Unlike narratives of familial disappointment that were discussed among African American and Hispanic participants, West Indian participants were more likely to center their experiences on a cultural perspective of disappointment and subsequent indifference about their whereabouts. Kleinman and Lukoff (1978, p. 197) suggest that, among West Indians, “there is a high level of commitment to group norms, which is enforced through an effective sanctioning network”; but when these group norms are violated by cultural transgressions like addictions, West Indians appear to be at great risk of diminished familial assistance. In addition, given West Indian perceptions and expectations of females as being good, trustworthy, responsible, and easier to control (Sargent & Harris, 1992), histories of addiction may further conflict with cultural ideologies when displayed by West Indian *women* and *women who are mothers*. Given our understanding of the role and benefits of family networks in mothering through addictions and recovery (see, for instance, Dunlap, 1992; Hardesty & Black, 1999), weakened familial acceptance and assistance may hinder West Indian women’s financial help during times of need, possibly deter women’s efforts to seek emotional guidance, and may limit babysitting options when seeking employment or attending to other post-incarceration responsibilities. As previously described, the navigation of motherhood is often described as a motivating factor initiating mothers’ desires and attempts at recovery, yet recovery efforts are hindered by difficulties navigating motherhood during recovery – such as those difficulties presented when “discarded” by the family network and refused assistance. Furthermore, such hindrances may hurt women’s attempts to maintain a salient maternal identity when they are unable to adhere to aspects of the ideal maternal self.

## Conclusion

This chapter emphasized the maternal experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers in recovery. I found that such mothers were encouraged to seek recovery as a means of negotiating motherhood, which was true for women both after one stint of incarceration as well as after multiple cycles of incarceration. Though some mothers worked to “recover” perceivably lost maternal roles and others worked to “enhance” weakened maternal roles, the mothers shared a motivation in their recovery to offset the negative effects of previous addictions and to prevent further harm to their children from relapse. Yet, this chapter also demonstrated that it was often difficult for these mothers to enact their social role as caretakers as well as their personal desires to rebuild and maintain mother-child relationships while they were in recovery. Such experiences were true for mothers who were still in the early stages of recovery as well as for mothers who believed their addictions were well behind them. In order to manage recovery efforts as mothers, they needed to learn how to cope with post-incarceration motherhood and other stresses associated with reentry without returning to past addictions. But this ability to engage in maternal identities during post-incarceration recovery was sometimes more stressful for mothers in the early phases of their recovery, for mothers with at least some contact with their children, as well as for mothers with greater maternal accountability.

These obstacles in navigating motherhood during recovery have serious implications for gender-responsive programs that strive to remain grounded in the realities of women’s experiences. How? On the one hand, we see that the negotiation of motherhood often encouraged mothers to seek sobriety as a means to offset the negative effects of previous addictions on their children. On the other hand, engaging in activities

associated with their maternal identities also introduced additional stresses in their recovery that further demanded the presence and use of constructive coping mechanisms to prevent relapses. Thus, reentry programs and the more specified treatment programs should not overlook the role of maternal identities for formerly incarcerated mothers in recovery given that these maternal identities often shape their future plans and actions. Knowledge of these personal hopes and plans can better aid programs in offering suggestions and developing strategies that not only helps to manage addiction histories but also incorporates the women's own maternal interests and guides them through associated obstacles. As Ward and Maruna (2007) explain, a risk-management approach is not sufficient to fully influence an individual's reintegration back into society. Rather than focusing solely on the management and prevention of bad acts like addictive behaviors, interventions should also make efforts to implement and reinforce the good features that the mothers hold and seek to enact – like maternal identities. “What this means for correctional practitioners is that it is not enough simply to equip individuals with skills to control or reduce their risk factors; it is essential that they are also given the opportunity to acquire a more adaptive personal identity, one that gives them a sense of meaning and fulfillment” (Ward & Maruna, 2007, p. 117).

When the mothers were able to maintain sobriety and manage recovery, this enhanced their relationships with their children, which boosted their self-esteem and further motivated recovery efforts. Thus, efforts to aid mothers in their recovery may not only provide individual long-term benefits, but may also contribute to the improvement of mother-child relationships. Yet, this chapter revealed how disappointments with trying to prevent a generational cycle of addiction may have a detrimental impact for the



mothers. On the one hand, their maternal identities were reinforced when their previous addictions did not lead to a generational cycle of destructive addictive behaviors since this was taken as an indication that they did something else correct as mothers despite their addictions. On the other hand, however, signs that their children were falling into their past footsteps were taken with frustration and displeasure, specifically with themselves as mothers. This highlights the importance of aiding the mothers in developing constructive coping mechanisms since, while attempting to engage with their maternal identities, their children's actions may also be a source of stress in recovery efforts.

Consistent with existing reentry research on formerly incarcerated women, mothers believed the presence of a positive social support network post-incarceration was instrumental in their efforts to recover from histories of addiction. Specifically, positive social interactions with others facilitated self-confidence and encouraged recovery efforts, which reinforced maternal identities. Yet, mothers also encountered additional stigmatization from society not only as mothers with criminal justice involvement but also as mothers with histories of addiction. Imposed labels on the mothers as "addicts" influenced the treatment they received – even when in recovery – and, at times, prompted additional obstacles in their recovery and post-incarceration reintegration. Judgment, however, did not only come from those without involvement in the criminal justice or those without histories of addiction; in fact, mothers also experienced judgment within reentry programs and treatment programs. Involvement in programs with these negative social interactions may not be as effective given the personal assault on women's self-confidence, which would otherwise motivate recovery. Thus, while this

chapter displayed the benefit of programs in demonstrating to mothers that they are not alone and recovery is possible, it is crucial that these programs also safeguard against further condemnation from other clients and belittling from program personnel – treatment that may offset the potential benefits of their presence.

I also found it notable that some mothers described the impact of familial responses to their previous and current recovery efforts, albeit familial responses that were shaped by cultural meanings. While kinship may serve as a buffer from crime in prosocial relationships, they may sometimes be unable to cushion individuals from involvement in criminal activity. This chapter demonstrates how West Indian participants, in particular, expressed a cultural disadvantage in receiving assistance from family members when there was a history of addiction. This lack of familial acceptance and assistance in the face of addiction can drastically shape women's pathways into more serious offending behaviors and also hurt efforts at post-release reintegration by way of recovery. For instance, due to family perceptions of addiction, this population may be less likely to seek help in their recovery. Aid may come in the form of rebuilding and fostering these relationships with family members – that is, identifying the dynamic of familial relationships, identifying any possibilities for these kinships to encourage reentry, and identifying how these relationships can be supported. However, efforts to rebuild and foster familial relationships that are both unsupportive and sometimes even abroad may be difficult and possibly ineffective. In these circumstances, formerly incarcerated mothers may be better supported by establishing other forms of social support networks to facilitate the recovery process, which often overlaps with the process of reentry. Work by Jean-Louis et al. (2001), for instance, illustrates the benefits of a

program that entails an understanding of the culturally specific obstacles faced by West Indians with histories of addiction. Even though that study emphasizes the experiences of Haitians, it highlights the role of cultural perceptions of addiction in family members' poor understanding of addiction and recovery as well as their treatment of and stigma directed towards those with addiction histories (Jean-Louis et al., 2001). The authors argue: "Many treatment programs lack an understanding of and sensitivity to ethnic cultures. This understanding and sensitivity is necessary to be effective with consumers" (Jean-Louis et al., 2001, p. 116). While having program personnel that shares the same ethnic background as the clients may potentially aid in their assistance, this is not always a practical solution. Thus, an adequate understanding of these social circumstances and cultural experiences should be a goal in current and future efforts to aid formerly incarcerated individuals of West Indian background.

In summary, my study provides information about the interplay of post-incarceration motherhood, recovery, and reentry – an overlap that is given limited attention from researchers and social practitioners. In view of the mothers' narratives, I advise researchers to bear in mind the high likelihood that women offenders are mothers (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Mumola, 2000), the vast presence of substance use among women offenders (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999; Snell & Morton, 1994), and the overlap of these elements in mothers' experiences after incarceration. It is beneficial to have this knowledge in order to more effectively aid mothers in their reentry whom have histories of addiction. This has serious implications for social practitioners tasked with helping this population. Thus, I urge social practitioners to incorporate the information I present here

into procedures that support women within this overlap of reentry efforts, recovery efforts, and maternal efforts.

## CHAPTER 7

## “I JUST WANT MY BABY BACK”: CREATING A HOME POST-INCARCERATION

“They arrested everybody in the house,” Donna recalled of the events leading to her incarceration. Those arrested included herself, her husband and her mother, leaving no one in the household to care for her 11-year-old son, who was also present at the time of the arrests. Donna was able to suggest a preferred placement for her son, and: “one of my neighbors came down....So I didn’t have to go through A.C.S. [Administration for Children’s Services] – thank God.” Even though parents have the right to request a placement for minor children when arrested, children are still at risk of entering the foster care system if unable to be placed under someone’s supervision. During her incarceration, Donna’s brother was able to gain temporary custody of her son – a custodial arrangement she was pleased with because “it could have been a lot worse. He could have been in foster care, being with somebody he didn’t know.” In fact, for many other mothers, there is an overlap between the criminal justice system and the foster care system (see Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007; Raimon et al., 2009; Roberts, 2012). Even though Donna avoided the foster care system with her son under the temporary custody of his uncle, she was hoping to reunite with him and live together after having spent nearly three years incarcerated: “I’m hoping to unite with him after this year....He’s fine where he is, but I just want my baby back.” This desire to reunite with children after incarceration and to regain full custody of under-age children was a common theme

throughout the interviews I conducted.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I explore the women's narratives about navigating motherhood and reintegration within this overlap between the criminal justice system and child protective services (Phillips & Dettlaff, 2009; Phillips et al., 2010), with attention to housing implications.

### **The Role of Kin in Providing Care and Serving as Caregivers**

With the exception of the children's fathers, who were often uninvolved with or unsupportive of their children, the women considered family to be the primary resource for childcare help during their incarceration or while readjusting after their incarceration. Consequently, family was fundamental in avoiding (or, in some instances delaying) children's placement in the foster care system. When the women's children *did* enter non-kinship foster care, this was typically in the absence of extended family members who were able to serve as temporary caregivers.<sup>2</sup>

Of the 37 formerly incarcerated mothers I interviewed, only a quarter had at least one child stay with a father or stepfather as the primary caregiver at any point pre-, during or post-incarceration.<sup>3</sup> No racial-ethnic group – African American, Hispanic or West Indian – was more likely than the others to have a child live with a father or

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<sup>1</sup> According to existing research, as many as 88% of mothers plan to live with their children upon their release (Baunach, 1985) and 59.5% expect to have custody (Barnes & Stringer, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Research also examines the role of kin networks in childcare and does so across racial groups. For instance, White mothers are more likely than non-White mothers to have their children's father serve as the caretaker during their absence and are also less likely to rely on familial assistance for the caretaking of their children (Baunach, 1985; Enos, 2001; Robison & Miller, 2016; Snell & Morton, 1994). Research also shows that non-White mothers are more likely to leave their children under the care of grandparents in their absence and are also more likely to give up custody *only* after preferred family arrangements are unavailable (Bresler & Lewis, 1983; Enos, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> In only one case did a child reside with a stepfather.

stepfather. Mothers explained potential reasons why African American, Hispanic, and West Indian children are not likely to remain under the care of their fathers when the mother is involved in the criminal justice system, as captured by Dolores, Kerry-Ann and Latoya, respectively:

The male...Hispanics and Blacks...they act differently...towards ummm living situations. They chip in too when they have to, but not as much....They don't really want responsibilities if they don't have to take on something.

African American women are less likely to be married when they go into the system and African American women are more likely to be in these nontraditional relationships. Or, if they are, probably their husbands or significant others or the kids' fathers are doing the same things that they were doing to get them in there [i.e., jail/prison]. So they all got in there together.

[T]he majority of [African American and Hispanic mothers]...don't have any fathers there. So, like, me...maybe they wanted their children to stay in that home that they were at, and they were like a single parent; if the father wasn't in their life, the kids wouldn't go with the father.

As demonstrated within these three accounts, a number of factors can explain why the women's children were not likely to stay with their fathers – including the nature of the relationship, the criminal involvement of the father, openness of the father to take on caregiving responsibilities and, if willing, the extent of this assistance.<sup>4</sup>

The extended family unit often compensated for the absence or disengagement of children's fathers, which was a prominent theme across all three racial-ethnic groups. In the ideal structure of family accountability, grandmothers were described as “the next in line” after fathers to care for children; yet, in reality, grandmothers were often the first

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<sup>4</sup> The African American, Hispanic, and West Indian mothers commonly believed their experiences differed from those of White mothers (assuming the fathers of their children were also White) because White males were presumed more capable of providing for their children, more willing to serve as caregivers and, thus, more likely to “take on responsibilities when they have to” – in this case, during and after maternal incarceration.

choice given the prevalence of single motherhood and the cultural importance of grandmothers' involvement. Rashida explained:

African Americans have a lot of single parenting. You know that right? So, there might be a lot of absent fathers around. So, you figure the mother that raised you – who else would be perfect to raise your children? Yes?

And Donna explained:

I think with African American women, I just think that like grandma is always like “ma” to kids, you know. Whether we’re in jail or we’re in the street, like, if we leave today [or] tomorrow, grandma is gonna take that baby, you understand? And that’s just how it is. Umm my son and my mother had a close relationship and umm it’s nothing that she wouldn’t do for him, and I know that. And, you know, it just seem that I had him but that’s her child.

Even though grandmothers in these ethnic groups are often the glue holding families together while nurturing and educating the young,<sup>5</sup> the responsibility of caring for children while parents were unable to was not solely restricted to the grandmother given that these kin networks still upheld the principle, as Rashida recounted, that “it takes a village to raise a child.”

African American, Hispanic, and West Indian families were described as “close,” “united” and “family-oriented,” with a “strong obligation to family.”<sup>6</sup>

We always have that extended family.... Us, we take anybody in. You know? “You don’t have no mother? Come live with us.” We believe in a home; not just a house, a home. So, we believe in making it a home. (Kerry-Ann, West Indian)

[I]t’s about the other person, but where there’s a *child* involved, it’s like: “Okay, well listen. Well listen, you got your own thing going on, but bring the baby over here,

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<sup>5</sup> Compared to White grandmothers, Black grandmothers are less likely to describe burdens on their mental health or social life from raising grandchildren and are also more likely to have been raised by a grandparent themselves and feel greater self-esteem when raising their own grandchildren (Pruchno, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Refer to Chapter Six for a discussion of cultural distinctions in familial acceptance and assistance when mothers had histories of addiction.



bring they stuff here, and I got ‘em. You go do what chu wanna do.” (Qiana, Hispanic/African American/Other)

Us – Latinos and Blacks – it seems like we take from the grandmother taking care of the kids and it’s our job; if not, the niece; if not, the sister. Somebody’s gonna take care of your children and babysit....That’s our obligation as a family....In the family, we count on one another to raise our kids because we’re not trusting people to take care of our children. (Francesca, Hispanic/African American/Other)

These descriptions are in line with existing work describing the strong extended familial bond among racial-ethnic minorities (Collins, 2009; Hill, 2003; Jacobs & Mollborn, 2012; Jambunathan et al., 2000; Pruchno, 1999; Smith, 1962; Stack & Burton, 1994). In sum, taking on caregiving responsibilities when the parent is unable to is embedded within the cultural foundation of family. The mothers considered familial help with caregiving responsibilities to be ideal compared to relying on strangers or the state (see also Hardesty & Black, 1999; Hill, 2003; Roberts, 2012) – often overlapping bodies that could not be trusted with their children since they can “label them as ‘troublemakers’” and “discard those kids,” as Natalie explained.

### **“Saved” Children and Social-Structural Demands to Reunify**

The Administration of Children’s Services (A.C.S.) works on the premises of keeping children safe and “saving” any children at risk of abuse or neglect by removing them from home environments deemed risky. Of the 37 mothers I interviewed, at least 11 mothers (30%) had children who were in foster care or had spent some time in the foster care system. A.C.S. either became involved when their children were born with a positive toxicology and an investigation was held (N = 6) or when mothers entered the criminal justice system or gave birth while incarcerated (N = 5). Even though a goal of A.C.S. is to keep the family unit intact when possible, it may seek an order from Family Court to have a child removed and placed in the foster care system. As Jesenia explained:

[A.C.S.] very primarily focus on trying to get [children] with another family member. The only way they really push it into the foster care system is if they don't have a family member in that jurisdiction that's willing or that has the responsibility to actually partake in that role. Now, if nobody is willing or able to take over the responsibilities of being the guardian then yea, they place them in the foster care system.

This absence of family members or the presence of family that was unable to serve as guardians were discussed by three of the mothers. As Emily noted, "I really don't have any family." When Valerie was arrested, the arresting officers asked if her mother could "get there before they pulled out the driveway" to care for her sons who were 15 and 16 at the time. Valerie, however, lived in a different state than her mother and other family members, so her children were taken into state custody. Carolina was the mother of a 4-year-old son and a 7-year-old daughter who lived with her prior to her last incarceration. Carolina described having to do everything herself in raising her children as a single parent without family members who could help. Carolina's parents had passed away prior to her incarceration and she only had one sister who was on disability due to hip implants. Though she believed her children would describe their relationship as "really, really close" due to her role as the primary caretaker, the absence of family who could help also shaped their pathway into foster care when she was incarcerated: "they were taken away because I had to go to prison and I didn't have [any]body to take care of them." In fact, Carolina's sister tried to get custody of the children but was found ineligible due to her disability. "She feels bad, you know, that she can't have them, that they had to go with strangers, you know, instead of staying within the family. But there's nothing that we could do."

Of the 11 mothers, two had children who were still in foster care and seven had children who were adopted (three by family and four by nonfamily), including one

mother who had an additional child awaiting final adoption by her maternal grandmother. In addition, only two mothers had regained custody of their children. Mothers who lose custody of their children to government agencies must demonstrate their “fitness” as mothers while negotiating “ownership” of their own children (see Enos, 2001) – a process that can be long and troublesome.<sup>7</sup> Common aspects of their service plan included programs for substance abuse, mental health evaluations, anger management classes, parenting classes, employment or school, and suitable housing – each of which often took months to achieve. As mentioned, Carolina lost custody of her children as she did not have family members able to care for them during her incarceration. A month and a half after her three-year incarceration, Carolina found herself still working to regain custody of her two children. Her service plan of necessary steps included random drug testing three times a week, a certificate from a drug treatment program, monthly visits with a psychiatrist, a certificate from anger management classes, and employment. She described working on each of these requirements all at the same time, sometimes feeling overwhelmed as if she were “running like a chicken with no head”:

I have my children in the system....I have to do x, y, and z to get them back, you know what I mean? So it's a lot, it's a lot for an incarcerated- you know, a mother that was incarcerated to just come home for all this to be on their plate.

Despite the stress of trying to adhere to all of the demands to regain custody, Carolina said the most rewarding moment she had as a mother since her release was holding an unsupervised visit with her children. In fact, at the time of her interview, she was looking forward to having her children stay overnight with her for both

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<sup>7</sup> In addition to time-consuming and troublesome requirements, Roberts (2012, p. 1495) argues, “child protection authorities often impose onerous requirements that are unrelated to the family’s needs and are unnecessary to evaluate the mother’s fitness to care for her child.”

Thanksgiving and Christmas. For approximately one month after her release, Carolina could only see her children under the supervision of an agency staff member. The transition to unsupervised visits not only suggests individual growth post-incarceration but, in a way, this transition also implies that a mother is increasingly adhering to agency standards of motherhood. Specifically, Carolina was only afforded the opportunity to interact with her children without supervision after complying with aspects of an allocated service plan and being seen as posing less of a risk. Yet, the mere absence of such a watchful eye by the state may allow for a more natural and comfortable interaction with children.

Women were forced to negotiate their motherly roles in the eyes of the law, but the mothers believed the process of demonstrating parental fitness was weighted against them due to their previous incarceration. For instance, Francesca stated: “[They] throw back your criminal record in your face. Isn’t that sad? Your criminal record: they throw it at you.” She described the system as being “so freakin’ corrupt,” using a mother’s criminal record against her with regard to parental rights. In addition to criminal records, substance use histories also posed challenges for mothers seeking to regain custody of their children. As I explained in Chapter Six, 70% of the mothers had histories of addiction. Though substance use often developed as a coping mechanism to verbal, physical and emotional abuse, the possession of controlled substances is criminalized and grounds for incarceration.<sup>8</sup> In addition, mothers’ use of these controlled substances may be considered child neglect in New York State when the use impairs their ability to

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<sup>8</sup> In addition to the mothers’ convictions for possession, substance use also shaped their involvement in offending behaviors like prostitution, theft, and fraud as ways to fulfill these addictions.

adequately care for the child (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016)<sup>9</sup>. Jesenia believed these mothers were viewed collectively in a negative light as perpetrators, rather than being understood as victims of their circumstances. As a result, she argued: “it’s a lot more difficult to get information on your case and how you can get through it because they’re just viewing you in one perspective. They view you as the victor, [rather] than the victim.” Instead of receiving services and support as victims of traumatic experiences, women felt they were ostracized, criminalized, and their children removed; then when trying to regain custody of their children, criminal records were seemingly used against them as a portrayal of their overall character without underlying information about their personal experiences.

In addition, one Hispanic mother – Priscilla – believed that Blacks and Hispanics, in particular, encountered more difficulties than their White counterparts in recovering their children:

I think that society still has...a very weird way of looking at certain people and judge them by their ethnicity. I believe that, you know, we are considered minorities and we get the [shorter] end of the stick. I believe that – and I truly believe that – a white person has more access and a better chance in, you know, recovering their children than a black person or Hispanic person would, just in my own experience.

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<sup>9</sup> According to New York Social Services Law SOS Section 371 (4-a): “‘Neglected child’ means a child younger than age 18 whose physical, mental, or emotional condition has been impaired or is in imminent danger of becoming impaired as a result of the failure of his or her parent or other person legally responsible for his or her care to exercise a minimum degree of care...by misusing a drug or drugs, or by misusing alcoholic beverages to the extent that he or she loses self-control of his or her actions, or by any other acts of a similarly serious nature requiring the aid of the court; provided, however, that where the respondent is voluntarily and regularly participating in a rehabilitative program, evidence that the respondent has repeatedly misused a drug or drugs or alcoholic beverages to the extent that he or she loses self-control of his or her actions shall not establish that the child is a neglected child in the absence of evidence establishing that the child’s physical, mental, or emotional condition has been impaired or is in imminent danger of becoming impaired” (as cited in Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016, p. 22).

Like Priscilla, her children's father was also Hispanic and even though he was not engaged in any criminality or substance use, it still took approximately two years for him to get custody and this was only possible after receiving housing assistance from a White nun. Priscilla believed that through disproportionate opportunities and unfair evaluations of fitness, it was more difficult for people of color like herself and her partner to gain custody of their children. In fact, research demonstrates that African American and Hispanic children in the foster care system are less likely than White children to reunify with their birth parents (Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007; Wulczyn, 2004), and African American children also reunify at a much slower rate (Wells & Guo, 1999).

Roberts (2012) takes this information and notes the overlap between Black children in foster care and their mothers in the prison system, arguing that this overlap is evidence of the systemic punishment of Black mothers. Thus, formerly incarcerated mothers believed that when it came to parental rights, they needed to "fight for [their] rights," due to social and structural disadvantages they faced as a result of having criminal records but to some degree as racial-ethnic minorities. In essence, as Priscilla summed up: "it's so easy to get your children removed, but it's so difficult for you to get them back."

Study participants noted several efforts that could help mothers returning from incarceration, including adjustments in the necessary conditions to regain custody as well as more programmatic assistance to help them navigate the hurdles of this process. Consistent with previous accounts arguing that a criminal record weighed against them in the process of demonstrating parental fitness, Vera discussed how some requirements

may be unnecessarily included merely due to the mothers' involvement in the criminal justice system:

For mothers who have young ones that are trying to fight to get their children back, I just think that: sometimes the hurdles – they want them to jump over and walk in a straight and narrow and kiss they ass. Like, really?....Like some, they need it; but not all. Like, don't put us all in one category because okay I may have went to jail or I may have been arrested; we're still not all the same. You gotta meet each individual for who they are.

As a result, Vera believed the requirements to reunite with children in foster care should be more catered to each individual without prejudices based on her criminal record. In addition to unnecessary demands to regain custody, such demands were deemed destructive. Marcia felt overwhelmed with meeting the demands of a service plan to reunite with her daughter:

I got stressed out....I couldn't take it no more. I started feeling closed in, I started feeling too much pressure. I'm not good under pressure. "You making me do all these things and I'm bring[ing] in week-by-week certificates, papers, doing this, reports, no drug testing – everything, everything, everything." I did everything for her.

Like Marcia, it was not uncommon for mothers to feel defeated by this process and wonder: "Why is my child not with me yet?" According to Emily, "a lot of women go through *shit* because the city takes their kids." Thus, they believed more programs devoted to helping formerly incarcerated mothers regain custody of their children were needed. As Emily suggested:

Maybe they can have more programs to help mothers get their children back because most of the time when women go to jail, A.C.S. steps in....And then, to get that child back, a mother has to go through *hell*.... If they come out and doing the right thing, give them their kids back man.

Thus, assistance from programs to reunite with their children and adjustments in the necessary requirements to regain custody were both believed to ease the process of demonstrating "fitness" – particularly as formerly incarcerated mothers.

### Creating a Home: Maternal Desires within Housing Decisions

Research shows that mothers' chances of reunifying with their children in foster care are drastically hurt by lack of adequate housing (Courtney, 1994; Wulczyn, 2004), and yet, difficulties finding and sustaining housing are collateral consequences of being involved in the criminal justice system (see Correctional Association of New York, 2013; Nerney et al., 2011; Roman & Travis, 2004; Thacher, 2008; Quets et al., 2016). The formerly incarcerated mothers who were recently released believed there was not enough assistance to find housing and there was also a lack of housing available upon their release. Vera, Natalie, and Donna, respectively, illustrate this theme:

A lot of women don't even know that if you coming out [from incarceration] and if you don't have no definite address, that there's suppose to be agencies helping you get an address. Housing is the biggest problem, the biggest problem – there's no assistance; there's nothing available. (Vera, 6 months in reentry)

[Women need] a program to help them get a crib [i.e., a home] or something like that....So other programs to help people get in to – even if those are the projects [public housing] – for housing, temporary housing, something! Something like that to help. (Natalie, 6.5 months in reentry)

I didn't have a counselor that said, "Okay, you can go here, or you could go here, or we could do this."...I just think there needs to be umm better counselors who can help guide people into that direction. Like, they have these *Connection*<sup>10</sup> books umm, however, you're on your own to write [to] these programs. I think it should be more of places that women can go with their children....You know, although we look through these books and see a lot of resources, when you come home it just don't

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<sup>10</sup> *Connections: A Guide for Formerly Incarcerated People in New York City* is a free annual guide that serves as a reentry resource to information on housing, education, financial assistance, substance use programs, legal services, immigration – to name a few. The guide is available through the New York Public Library, which provides a PDF version on its website (<https://www.nypl.org/help/community-outreach/correctional-services>). While print copies of the book are also available to incarcerated individuals pending release, there is limited printing of the book and priority is given to those approaching release. In addition, the Spanish version of *Connections* is only available as a PDF document; so incarcerated individuals must submit a mailed request for access to the guide. Yet, at the time of this study, incarcerated Spanish speakers were only allowed to request a maximum of 40 pages to be printed at a time and there was also a one-year lag in the Spanish translation of the annual guide.



seem like they're all that they're supposed to be like, you know. "Y'all do this?" "Oh no, we don't do this anymore. We used to do that." So books are not being revised and so on and so forth – information. (Donna, 2.5 weeks in reentry)

Such women maintained that housing opportunities were limited but so was assistance from agencies, housing programs, and counselors to help them secure housing. When counselors were accessible during their incarceration and tasked with helping the women locate housing, among other things, they were deemed unhelpful and as though they "wasn't doing crap," as Donna surmised.

Common sentiments among the formerly incarcerated mothers were that they hoped to have a home they could call their own. Yet, only four described having their own homes. At the time I spoke with the women, 14 lived in transitional housing units, followed by shelters (N = 9) and the apartments of family members (N = 5). The remaining five were in a variety of living situations including a residential drug treatment program (N = 1), an apartment with a roommate (N = 1), a room that a stranger was subletting (N = 1), homelessness (N = 1), and one whose living situation was unknown.

What did creating a home entail? A home was described as a place that afforded the women privacy from strangers and a sense of independence in which they owned the keys that opened the doors to their living quarters. It was a place where they had the freedom to engage in minor acts that others may take for granted such as playing music, having a gathering, or even smoking a cigarette. A place where they were not restricted from having visitors when or if they pleased. In addition, those with contact with their children hoped to have a place of their own that was also suitable enough to ultimately reside with their children, whether they were under-aged or adult children that were still dependent. Marcia was a mother of four under-aged children and had been in the

community for a year and four months at the time of her interview. She explained: “I need my own space, my own room, my own apartment so when my kids do choose to come to spend [time], they have their own room [and] they could do what they do and I don't have to have nobody tell me what to do or what to do with my kids.” Ana had spent a year and two months in the community since her release from incarceration. Ana noted that upon her release, she wanted “a stable home” for herself and her three children (two minors and one adult) where she could “give them a roof over their head” and know that “they were gonna be safe in a secure place.” At the time of her interview, Rashida had been released for one year and three months and was living in a residential drug treatment program. She had a daughter who was 22 and two sons who were 18 and 29. Even though Rashida’s eldest son had “his own family” and a stable living situation, she had hopes of living with her other two adult children and her grandchildren. As previously described, Rashida was not content with her daughter’s living situation due to the difficulties with her apartment, where she lived with two children. Rashida explained, “I’m not secure with where she’s [living] at so I rather keep her with me.” When we spoke, Rashida and her youngest son were actively searching for a 5-bedroom house to rent for herself, her son and daughter, and her daughter’s two children: “It's like 5 bedrooms. That’s what I’m looking for: everybody under one roof.” Francesca had been released from incarceration 11 years prior to her interview. She described her studio apartment as being “too small” for both her and her 19-year-old son, stating: “He can’t live with me here.” Even though her son was away at college at the time, and legally an adult, she still had plans to find a two-bedroom apartment for them – an interest that was still present numerous years after her release from incarceration. While mothers had an interest in creating a home

environment during their reentry that was also suitable for under-aged or dependent children, it is important to note that this was only the case when mothers had contact and when their child had not been adopted.

### **Maintaining and Enhancing Maternal Relationships in the Shelter System**

Given the limited assistance women had in finding available housing and creating a home environment, they said parole officers were “quick to send [them] home to a shelter.” In fact, at least 18 of the 37 formerly incarcerated mothers had spent time in the New York City shelter system at some point during their reentry or were staying in a shelter at the time of their interview. Yet, the women’s discussions of their shelter experience varied according to whether they stayed in shelters for adult families or shelters for families with under-aged children and pregnant women.

According to the Department of Homeless Services (D.H.S.), “families with children” include: pregnant women, families with children under 18 years old, and families with pregnant women. Even though some family shelters allow visitors, this is typically restricted to designated timeframes and does not allow for overnight stays unless exceptions are made for mothers with joint custody of children. Social workers, visiting nurses, parole officers and A.C.S. personnel are allowed upstairs into designated rooms. Yet, outside family members (including children) are typically restricted from entering designated spaces and limited to the main floor or open spaces like multi-purpose rooms. These regulations, however, presented a number of obstacles for women staying with their under-aged children and for women with children outside of the shelter.

For instance, Bianca’s two daughters were ages 16 and 28. Even though Bianca lived in a shelter with her teenage daughter at the time of her interview, she insisted that a

downfall of living in a shelter was: “you can’t be involved with your family.” For example, shelter regulations limited quality time with her oldest daughter, who was pregnant with Bianca’s first grandchild. Her daughter was unable to visit when she pleased and was not able to interact with Bianca comfortably within the confines of the shelter. As Bianca explained, “we see each other often. But it’s just like it’s not the way we want to see one another.” Bianca wanted to be able to cook and have dinner with her daughter, to watch TV together with their feet up, and to give her daughter the opportunity to sleep over if she desired. Yet, given her stay in a shelter, these things were not possible. Instead, she found herself forced to meet with her daughter in a multi-purpose room located on the main level of the shelter. “Who wants to go sit downstairs in the multi-purpose room for three hours? Sitting there. You can’t cook, you can’t watch TV, you can’t do nothing but sit there. Who wants to do that?” Furthermore, the environment of the shelter was not conducive to helping her youngest daughter overcome emotional battles and suicidal thoughts. In fact, during the week of Bianca’s interview, her teenaged daughter was on suicide watch at a nearby hospital. Given the rules and restrictions of her shelter and their impact on her mother-child relationships, Bianca was making plans to exit the shelter system in order to increase contact with her oldest daughter in a comfortable environment, to improve the mental health of her youngest daughter, and to be readily available after the birth of her grandchild.

Latoya also described her previous experience in a family shelter as “hell” for both her and her two children, who were minors during their shelter stay. After her son was away working at Boy Scout camp for two months, he was taken off of the approved shelter census because he was away for an extended period of time. Her son slipped into

the shelter in order to stay with his mother for a weekend but was ultimately kicked out at 3 o'clock in the morning when his presence was discovered:

I told him not to come, [because] he didn't have anywhere to stay. Somebody sneaked him in the building, and then they found out, and put my son out in the street at 3 o'clock in the morning. And there wasn't nothing I could do. And I said, "I told you not to come here, you're not allowed here 'cause you're not on this thing [list] with ummm DHS, Department of Homeless Services."

Latoya believed there was nothing she could do about her son being kicked out, because shelter regulations allowed it. Overall, Latoya described her shelter experience as "so horrific" and believed her son "hated" the shelter. As a family, "we had to sacrifice to live in that place for two years."

At the time of her interview, Priscilla was staying at a family shelter with her 17-year-old son, her 9-year-old son, and her husband. As she explained: "My 17-year-old hates the fact that he's in a shelter 'cause, you know, it's a little room connected to a bathroom. And, you know, he complains constantly about it." She also associated her son's response to his age and distinguished this from the response of her 9-year-old son: "So, as a teenager, [my oldest son] doesn't like the living conditions....So, I get complaints from him. But my little one, he's happy, he don't care. He's like, 'Mommy's back.'" Her older son's reaction motivated her to "keep it clean" and "try to make it as homely as [she] can."

Interestingly, when the mothers in my study were in adult family shelters or had previous experiences in these shelters, their discussions were overwhelmingly critical of shelter conditions as "horrific," "filthy" and "disgusting" and also emphasized the array of intake difficulties. Unlike the designated shelters for families with under-aged children, New York City shelters for adult families can shelter any assortment of family

members over 18 years of age. This includes adult siblings, adult couples who are legally married or with a domestic partnership, and caretaker-dependent relationships (e.g., grandparent to grandchild, aunt/uncle to niece/nephew, and parent to child/stepchild). Families must provide legal documents in order to verify classification as an adult family unit. To be found eligible for shelter placement, families must demonstrate housing history for the year leading up their application and must also prove that the parties in question resided together for at least 180 days of the previous year. In addition, eligibility for emergency shelter is contingent upon proof that there are no other housing options available. So, calls are typically made to previous residences in order to confirm whether the applicant can return.

These requirements of proving housing history and current homelessness were typically the basis of shelter ineligibility for the formerly incarcerated mothers I spoke with and, as a result, were often a source of stress during the intake process. Housing history needed to be confirmed every 10 days, typically via phone calls. Yet, as Emily argued: “If they can’t get in contact with somebody, you’re ineligible.” Emily and her husband were found ineligible on five occasions, and five times they were asked to pack up their belongings and return to the intake center. In fact, the day before her interview, they were told to “pack it” and “go back” to intake— at 8 o’clock on a Sunday morning. Like Emily, Valerie was also repeatedly found ineligible and asked to leave the shelter. In fact, this occurred the morning of her interview and Valerie was asked to leave the shelter and return to the intake center. Like Emily, Valerie was also found ineligible because the contact person to verify her homelessness was not reached by phone.

At the time of her interview, Vera was living with her partner and 22-year-old son. The three of them had been sharing a single room, which they rented as a sublet from a stranger found on Craigslist. While this arrangement had previously been the most financially convenient for her family, Vera had recently lost her job and was planning to seek shelter assistance as “the first step” to finding an apartment. Yet, she was uncertain they would even be found eligible for shelter:

So, when they ask me, “Where you lived?” I don’t have proof to tell them where I was for six months. I don't know whether that’s gonna affect us or not...in terms of being able to be found eligible ‘cause you have to be found eligible. And then, if you’re found ineligible then what the hell do we do? I don't know.

Even though they could no longer afford to remain where they resided, without any documentation of housing history, her family would likely be found ineligible for shelter placement.

### **Establishing a Home: The Role of Under-Aged and Adult Children**

Compared to shelters, which typically focus on the mass placement of homeless individuals, transitional housing facilities are more likely to provide onsite services to its occupants to aid in the transition to more independent living. Though both are temporary living arrangements, the women understood transitional housing arrangements without their minor children as precursors to having their own home. As previously noted, 14 participants lived in transitional housing units at the time of their interview. Transitional housing provided the women with structure, seemingly easing the transition from the previous surveillance of incarceration to more independent and liberated living arrangements in the future. Yet, even when mothers were residing in communal living spaces with other women and appreciated having “a roof over [their] head,” they still preferred to have their own apartments and to ideally live with minor children. As

Carolina, who had been in the community for approximately two months post-incarceration, explained:

I have a roof over my head and whatever but I'm with other people. I want my own, you know what I mean? You know, my own apartment and with my children, you know, so but I know it's one thing at a time. One step at a time. So just coming out it's hard, it's hard.

Two-and-a-half weeks after her release from prison, Donna was residing in a residential reentry program that offered independent living; yet, she found it emotionally damaging that she was only able to spend a limited amount of quality time with her son at her residence before she needed to drop him off again with her brother. After spending nearly three years incarcerated, she felt “ready to step back in the mother role” because a mother’s duties are “consistent and just have to be done.”

For mothers trying to regain custody of their minor children, it was not sufficient enough to merely have housing, but living arrangements needed to be assessed and deemed suitable enough for the children. Priscilla explained:

You're fighting the city. And then, you have people telling you: “Oh, you gotta prove your- You gotta prove you have housing – an apartment for them. Every room has to have a window. They have to have guards on the windows.” All this and it's like pressure: “How I'ma do all this? I don't have \$10,000 on my hands!” And, I was living in a shelter with them, you know, or I was living in a room with them, or I was in an apartment but this apartment doesn't have these guard windows that the city wants and they'll go and check: “No, we don't want this. This is not good enough for the children.”

Though these regulations may be warranted for the children’s protection, this was often a source of stress for the formerly incarcerated mothers who were burdened with financial difficulties (as described in Chapter Five), who struggled to find *any* housing post-incarceration, and who were then required to meet prerequisites concerning their housing conditions in order to regain custody of their children. This also demonstrates that even



when mothers were able to obtain housing post-incarceration, they were sometimes faced with the reality that this progress in their reintegration was sometimes still not enough, according to state standards, to regain parental rights to their own children.

Mothers to older children beyond their teenage years also described a desire to have their “own place” but it was no surprise that they discussed living with their children differently. These mothers preferred to live alone and did not want to intrude on the self-sustained households of their children, including when they had families of their own. For instance, Henrietta had three children ages 43, 32, and 25. Even though she had an open relationship with her three children in which she could visit and stay for as long as she pleased, she did not want to intrude on her children’s space by moving into any of their homes. Living in the shelter system at the time of her interview, Henrietta described choosing not to live with her children because they were “grown” and had their own lives to manage without further accountabilities associated with her presence. Lucinda had a 29-year-old daughter and believed it was not ideal for her to live under the same roof as her daughter since they were two adult woman – both with strong personalities – and doing so could potentially introduce quarrels in their relationship.

Interestingly, there appeared to be some conflict when the children were perceived as being old enough to support themselves but were still dependent on their formerly incarcerated mothers. For instance, Onika was torn between wanting a bigger apartment to better accommodate her youngest daughter and wanting her daughter to find her own home. Three months after moving into her one-bedroom apartment, her 20-year-old daughter moved in and began sleeping in the living room. When asked about her living arrangements, she explained:

I'm trying to find a two-[bedroom apartment]....I'm ready to move 'cause I'm in a one-bedroom and my daughter sleeps in the living room....I can't take it no more 'cause you got to go through my bedroom to go to the bathroom. I have like a railroad apartment. So, that's crazy; you have no privacy.

Here, Onika explained wanting a bigger home to make living arrangements more comfortable for herself but still provided space for her daughter. Yet, she was also displeased with her daughter's lack of responsibility and proclaimed wanting her daughter to find a place of her own:

My daughter don't wash dishes or nothing in my house. She don't do absolutely nothing....It's time to get the hell out....She wants me to get a bigger apartment. I want her to get the hell out....I don't want to see her in the street. I don't want to see her in the street, but you have to make an effort to do something with your life.

This illustrates a conflict in the approach to take with living arrangements of an adult child who is still reliant on the mother. This conflict, however, was more troublesome for Josefina, whose charges were still pending at the time of her interview. She had spent time at Riker's Island before being released on bail to an apartment she shared with her son. Even though her son was 20 years old and legally an adult, she still tended to him by washing his clothes and cooking for him – plus doing other household responsibilities. She believed it was “scary” that her adult son “doesn't know how to live by himself” and was “freaking out” with anxiety about living alone if she was convicted. Thus, even mothers to *adult* children were not exempt from concerns that may arise while living with children (like household tasks) or while potentially being separated from children, like child anxiety.

### **Adjustments for Mothers, Temporary Caregivers, and Children**

If their custody was not previously revoked by a government agency, mothers were often faced with the decision of organizing suitable living arrangements for their

children during their incarceration (Enos, 2001; Leverentz, 2014; Siegel, 2011). Upon their release, the formerly incarcerated mothers often searched for ways to shift their children from previous living arrangements as they hoped to find suitable housing for themselves and their children. This, however, called for the mothers to have comfortable living conditions and reentry circumstances, to negotiate with the temporary caregivers of their children, and to also navigate motherhood in the eyes of their children.

### **Mothers**

Upon the women's release from incarceration, their children's living arrangements remained the same until they were able to find or create living conditions appropriate for their children. Thus, they emphasized the need to "get [themselves] together" and "get established" or "situated" in order to reunite with their children as they wished. Though the formerly incarcerated mothers often had hopes of finding suitable housing for themselves and their children, they understood over time that reaching this maternal goal consisted of various steps to improve their overall circumstances after being incarcerated. Common steps included enhancing mother-child relationships, obtaining a steady income, remaining abstinent from any substance use, and finding *suitable* housing for their children. Considering some of these reentry obstacles, mothers sometimes believed the best home for their children were homes that did not include them as primary caregivers; for instance, in some instances, mothers maintained custody of children but other family members served as primary caregivers.<sup>11</sup> Yet, these arrangements were typically temporary until they were able to better reintegrate back into

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<sup>11</sup> Michalsen (2011) discovered that most mothers avoided caregiving responsibilities due to concerns with their ability to realistically care for their children, but other mothers avoided these responsibilities in the best interest of their children's needs and relationships with other caregivers.

society after their incarceration. Given the numerous difficulties associated with each of these steps, the women often described taking it “one day at a time” and “one step at a time.” Even within this understanding that reintegrating entailed numerous smaller steps, the formerly incarcerated mothers still hoped to move quickly to meet their maternal goals. As Donna surmised: “I know we got to crawl before we walk; I just plan to walk fast.”

Whether staying in shelters or other housing arrangements like living with family or residing in transitional housing, mothers with minor children were still driven to make adjustments to better their life circumstances and ultimately benefit their children. At the time of her interview, Marie was living in a housing facility provided by a reentry program. She shared the independent living space with three other women – of which two also had their children living with them. While the room was sufficient for her, it was not enough for her teenage son to comfortably live with her: “I want him to live with me but I don’t have a place to put him to live with me....My son is 13, I’m 42. And I can not be sleeping in the same bed with [him]....I don’t want him to come and I am in a program and we sharing the same room.” Marie described getting herself “together” in preparation for him to live with her – post-incarceration plans that she shared with her son, who was living with Marie’s mother. Likewise, Ana described not wanting to “uproot” her under-aged sons from the stable environment that was established during her incarceration, in which they stayed with her parents to then expose them to residential instability as she searched for a place to settle down. Instead, Ana made efforts to create a “stable environment for a home” before making arrangements for her children to join her. These accounts demonstrate how despite their personal desires to reside with their children and

create a home, formerly incarcerated mothers did not want to rush their children into their own unstable or unsuitable living arrangements.

Having their minor children live with them before the mothers were fully ready contributed to further stress post-incarceration and had an adverse effect on their reentry. After two years and five months away from her then four-year-old son during her initial incarceration, Qiana reunited with him – a reunion that occurred six days after her release. This transition, however, was overwhelming for her as she “was trying to get to know him [and] he was trying to get to know me.” To further complicate this navigation of post-incarceration motherhood, Qiana was still dealing with the demands of parole:

I had the expectations of this [reentry] program....doing the interning and all that, and then having stipulations from parole: drug treatment, the whole mental health, anger management, domestic violence. So, it was- I had a lot of expectations on top of, you know, taking care of myself and also being a mother. So, it became overwhelming.

According to Emily, being on parole had been “embarrassing” and “stressful,” as she was susceptible to random visits from her parole officer, which had “put a lot of stress on [her] son.” These accounts demonstrate how the additional responsibilities of motherhood along with the demands of community supervision as formerly incarcerated mothers may contribute to the stresses of reintegration.

For some women, the time they did not reside with their children allowed them to better situate themselves within the community as formerly incarcerated individuals. For instance, for the first five months after her release, Madison was living separately from her two children, ages 6 and 4. She felt this time period was essential to adjust to life post-incarceration before she took on the additional maternal responsibilities living with her children in a single-family apartment, which was provided by a reentry program:

I feel like that was really good that I didn't get them as soon as I came home because it is just too much. Like it doesn't matter how much time you do, coming back into society is just an adjustment alone. So let alone having children that depend on you, you have to be considerate of their every needs. It's hard and I'm glad I didn't have to be considerate of their every need because for four years, I didn't have to think about nobody else needs but my own. Soo...I appreciated having to come home and just worry about myself and get myself together. I got a job and I took care of things that I needed to take care of before I actually received them.

Thus, even though the formerly incarcerated mothers admitted their desire to “do things quick” upon their release and reunite with their children, looking back they also appreciated it when they *did* wait until they were settled; this allowed mothers to better take on the full responsibilities of being primary caregivers living with their children.

### **Temporary Caregivers**

Consistent with existing literature (Engstrom, 2008; Hanlon et al., 2007; Turanovic et al., 2012), it was extremely common for children to reside with grandparents during maternal incarceration and also post-incarceration while the mothers prepared themselves to reside with their under-aged children with whom they maintained communication. Though family members were essential as temporary caregivers in the mothers' absence, temporary caregivers were also subject to changes in their role. This, however, introduced conflict when temporary caregivers hoped to make temporary arrangements more permanent without the mothers' full consent. For instance, upon their release, formerly incarcerated mothers may be confronted with “relatives assuming sole ‘ownership of mothering’” (Enos, 1998, p. 64) and relatives who are not willing to relinquish their temporary role as primary caregivers (Correctional Association of New York, 2013). Thus, despite personal goals and plans to find housing for themselves and their children, dealing with these family members at times complicated efforts to accomplish ideal custodial and housing arrangements.

For instance, Josefina's youngest two sons were under temporary custody of their paternal grandmother prior to Josefina's incarceration. Yet, when she was released, she learned that she had lost parental rights as their paternal grandmother proceeded with obtaining full parental rights during her incarceration. Josefina felt betrayed by someone she trusted to care for her sons during her incarceration but who, instead, stripped her of her parental rights. In fact, by the time of her interview, Josefina was no longer in communication with her sons since their paternal grandmother "separated everything" and would not allow her to speak with them.

With the exception of Ana's daughter who was of age during Ana's last incarceration, Ana's parents had temporary custody of her two under-aged sons; yet, Ana's release was met with disagreement from her parents about the best custodial and living arrangements for her sons moving forward. Ana's father wanted his grandchildren to stay with him because he was accustomed to their company, and Ana's mother believed her grandchildren were "better off" with their grandmother. Ana, however, stressed her maternal role and responsibility to take care of her children even during difficult times. This introduced a clash over what Ana believed was best for her own children as their mother:

[My mother] wanted me to keep them there. I'm their mom, they're coming with me. Simple as that and I think she has a problem with that....It bothered me to see that, that she really felt that I was just gonna leave them there and forget about my kids because she felt I thought it would be easier. Why would you think that of me? Why would you ever have that impression of me when all I do is fight every day to provide for my kids and be with my kids?....I think she misunderstood me as a mother.

By having her children live with her and away from their grandparents, Ana described standing her ground against her mother who "wanted to take control." Notably, Ana believed she was misunderstood as a mother and this contributed to her mother's

assumption that the children were “better off” staying with their grandparents.

Unbeknownst to Ana’s mother, Ana switched temporary custody over to her adult daughter so she was legally able to pick up her younger brothers by car and drive them from Las Vegas to New York, meaning the three of them were able to live with their mother post-incarceration. Unaware of the shift in temporary custody, Ana’s mother threatened to call the police on Ana’s daughter for kidnapping. This threat was the main reason Ana did not believe her relationship with her mother would ever change. Though Ana was content with her decision and pleased that she was able to live with her children post-incarceration, this decision ultimately resulted in a strained relationship with her own mother as they cut all communication and were still not speaking at the time of her interview approximately 10 months later.

### **Children**

Though formerly incarcerated mothers often had hopes that their minor children would reside with them post-incarceration, this involved their children transitioning from previous living arrangements that were established during the mothers’ incarceration. Mothers varied in how they confronted this change and brought it to their children’s attention. For instance, even though there was only a one-year age difference between Donna’s son (14) and Marie’s son (13), they took different approaches talking with their children about shifts in their living arrangements. As Donna explained:

[I]t’s not just getting them back because he’s at that teenage years where, you know, I might want to make a decision but the decision might not be good for him. So I have to like ask him a lot of things like, ‘How do you feel about this?’ or ‘Do you want to finish school where you’re at?’ or ‘Are you ready to come here and finish school?’

While Donna took a more collaborative approach in asking her son what he wanted to do, Marie was more controlling of the situation as she explained to her son that his



grandmother was only a *temporary* caregiver and he would eventually need to reside with her. Seven months after her release, however, he was still residing with his grandmother.

Marie described their dialogue:

He like, “No. I am staying here with grandma where it’s safe. Come stay with us ‘cause I have memory in this house, mommy. I’m with ma- grandma, you know. You can come here.” I am like, “[Son], I can’t come live with mommy anymore. I have to live on my own. You weren’t meant to live with ma forever.”

According to Marie, children of formerly incarcerated women “need to be enticed” by showing them that the mother is stable and that prospective living arrangements will also be stable.

Given the time spent away from their mothers during maternal incarceration, some children were already in somewhat stable environments with temporary caregivers. Whether or not the children were in stable living arrangements, women believed that children must be reassured there will be some stability if and when residing with them upon their release. Yet, housing stability may not necessarily equate with happiness for the children. For instance, even though most formerly incarcerated mothers aimed to live in an apartment setting with their children, some mothers found that this transition sometimes introduced other unexpected obstacles for their children – especially when the children were accustomed to previous living arrangements. Even though Ana was happy to live with her three children in a single family apartment, she believed the transition was particularly difficult for her eldest – her 21-year-old daughter.

I feel it’s been a little difficult for her because she’s lived on her own for two years so her coming to a small apartment....Even though I don't put the rules too much on her. But living with her brothers: sibling rivalry. It’s been a little difficult for her. I think it’s a little overwhelming at times.

Ana's oldest child was no longer accustomed to residing with her two younger siblings, making the change somewhat difficult and overwhelming.

Like many formerly incarcerated mothers, Madison was placed in transitional housing that consisted of communal living with other formerly incarcerated women. In this particular communal living housing, the women were able to reside with their children. After five months of residing in communal living with her two children, Madison transitioned to a single-family apartment under the same program. Though this transition was considered a sign of progress in post-incarceration housing, her 6-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter preferred the communal living to the single-family apartment. According to Madison, "moving to an apartment was actually harder than living in the communal living for them." Her children were not accustomed to living in "such a little space" unable to "run around" and play with other children – something they were able to do in the communal living, which more closely resembled their living arrangements with Madison's mother during her four-year incarceration.

Once formerly incarcerated mothers were living together with their children, there was sometimes conflict between the mothers' desires for their children and the reality of their children's conduct. As described in Chapter Four, children may develop habits while living with temporary caregivers in the mothers' absence – bad habits that mothers worked to reverse as well as good habits that mothers tried to get accustomed to. Not only was it challenging for the formerly incarcerated mothers to navigate motherhood given this conflict, but it is likely that the children also underwent some adjustments as they transitioned to living with their mothers after maternal incarceration. As Siegel (2011, p. 175) suggests, mothers' post-release expectation to "put on the mantle of

motherhood” may create conflict in their children’s comfort if they have grown accustomed to the mother’s absence or witnessed their mothers struggling in their reentry (Siegel, 2011, p. 175).<sup>12</sup> So while my study does not account for the experiences of children with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated mothers, the work of scholars like Siegel that directly examine the children’s perspective are a great complement to my study.

### Conclusion

As mothers, women with children are expected to be primary caregivers and to provide suitable housing for their children as a demonstration of their maternal fitness to the public and to legal entities like the Administration for Children’s Services (A.C.S.). I found in this study that the same expectations are held of formerly incarcerated mothers. When women do not fit these expectations, motherhood is “redefined as a privilege that can be revoked” (Brown & Bloom, 2009, p. 319) and children must be “saved” by removing them from the home until parenting behaviors are corrected.

The standards for proving fitness, however, are grounded in social norms about what motherhood should entail, which may be problematic for formerly incarcerated mothers of color given the array of inequalities they face spanning gender, race, ethnicity, finances, and status as ex-offenders. The women I spoke with believed mothers in the criminal justice system are often judged collectively as criminals, making it more

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<sup>12</sup> In her book *Disrupted Childhoods*, Jane Siegel remarkably captures the impact of maternal incarceration from the children’s perspective. In her work, she found: “All too often, a mother’s return from prison did not instantly erase the difficulties of the past but introduced a new set of challenges, some resulting from the differing expectations mother and child brought to the process, some from the numerous barriers imposed on people returning from prison, and still others from mother failing to change the behavior that led to her legal problems in the first place. The convergence of these factors can lead to disappointment and bitterness for the child” (Siegel, 2011, p. 174).

difficult to navigate Children's Services and to be deemed as fit mothers. They encountered difficulties regaining custody of their children not only as formerly incarcerated mothers, who are subject to stigmatization and collateral consequences of incarceration, but also as women of color, who are subject to social and structural barriers due to their racial-ethnic background. Scholars argue that the overrepresentation of African American and Hispanic children in the child welfare system and the disproportionate attention to their mothers is likely due to impractical norms of motherhood, biased evaluations of maternal fitness, and a disregard for the impact of socioeconomic disparities (see Appell, 2007; Roberts, 2012). While some children in foster care may potentially benefit from some aspects of a new environment, the assumption that non-kinship foster care may serve as a saving grace for each of these children is flawed (see, for instance: Leathers, 2005; Reilly, 2003; Schofield & Beek, 2005). As Appell (1998, p. 377) argues:

Making children linger in foster care is unconscionable when what they are waiting for is so subjective: turning 'bad' women into 'good' ones....While waiting for their 'bad' mothers to become 'good,' children are at risk of growing up without the love, care, and sense of belonging that a parent – even a bad one – can provide.

The children, however, are not the only ones who may be troubled when they are removed from the household. This chapter demonstrates how the formerly incarcerated mothers became overwhelmed in the face of multiple requirements posed upon them from social agents and parole officers. Thus, families may be better supported when equipped with services like counseling and given practical assistance that evens an unequal playing field of opportunities. As Beth Richie (2001, p. 379) argues: "It should be emphasized that even if regaining custody is not a desirable option, the availability of services to assist in responding to these issues is critical to successful reintegration."

It is important to note, however, that custodial arrangements are not definitive markers of mother-child relationships and, alone, may not demonstrate the impact of maternal relationships on mothers' reintegration post-incarceration. In spite of the practical factors that impact custodial and distant parenting arrangements, women maintain their maternal identity (Enos, 2001) and their children often remain a source of motivation in their reentry (see Leverentz, 2014; Michalsen, 2011; Sharpe, 2015). According to Richie (2001, p. 379), "even a noncustodial relationship with one's children can be an important stabilizing force in women's lives as they make difficult transitions" during their reentry. Leverentz (2014, p. 82) also found that "regardless of whether the women were custodial parents, children were central to their sense of self." Some scholars have discussed the complexities between motherhood and caregiving as some women may navigate motherhood by allowing others to assume guardianship (Stenius et al., 2005) and accepting their diminished involvement as caretakers (Enos, 2001). Yet, for many of the formerly incarcerated mothers in this study, these arrangements were merely temporary, unless there was no communication or their children had been adopted. Instead, the mothers were focused on making adjustments in themselves and their lives in order to reverse these arrangements. Thus, this chapter highlights how even in noncustodial and nonresidential arrangements, when mothers maintained communication, their children still motivated them to improve their life circumstances to be able to create a home environment post-incarceration.

It was important for formerly incarcerated mothers to create a home not only for a sense of stability and independence, but also as a means of navigating motherhood. Yet, periods of incarceration introduced additional constraints as they made living

arrangements and endured difficulties in finding housing without adequate support and amidst a lack of suitable housing options. All in all, the mothers felt as though they were deprived of viable pathways into both finding and securing housing, whether it was solely for themselves post-incarceration or also to accommodate their children. In addition, the women's living arrangements after incarceration also presented substantial obstacles to regain or maintain relationships with their children while simultaneously trying to reintegrate back into society (see also Michalsen, 2010). Thus, more should be done to help formerly incarcerated mothers obtain housing upon their release – efforts that should begin during their incarceration and continue throughout reentry.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine women's narratives of motherhood post-incarceration and the role of mothering in their reintegration back into society after their release. Existing research demonstrates that most incarcerated women are mothers who will eventually return back to society (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Greenfeld & Snell 1999; Mumola, 2000). Upon their release, these mothers are faced with collateral consequences of incarceration (like difficulties obtaining work and problems finding housing), combined with the added demands of navigating motherhood. Formerly incarcerated mothers may face stigma simply from being known as someone who has been incarcerated. But they may grapple with further stigma when their performances of motherhood are at variance with normalized understandings of motherhood in which they are expected to adhere to White, middle-class standards. Thus, I shy away from a blanket understanding of motherhood that stigmatizes formerly incarcerated mothers and devalues their maternal experiences. Instead, I present the women's own narratives about post-incarceration motherhood and the impact of navigating motherhood on their reintegration back into the community. In doing so, I comparatively analyzed the women's narratives across racial-ethnic background and mother-child contact, and gave special attention to various aspects of life post-incarceration including childrearing practices, employment and finances, recovery from addiction, custody of children, and living arrangements. Thus, my study is unique in its contribution as it not only advances criminological knowledge on the influences of post-incarceration motherhood for the reentry of formerly incarcerated women, but it also unpacks motherhood identities and

experiences among racial-ethnic minority groups and across varying mother-child contact relationships.

The women in this study encountered numerous restrictions during their reentry to engage in behaviors they deemed meaningful as mothers. For instance, even though mothers are “filled with expectations of caring for others while under the gaze of the state” (Ferraro & Moe, 2003, p. 23), incarceration limited access to their children and contributed to strain in mother-child relationships. Mothers then returned to communities with conflicts between their desires for mother-child relationships and the realities they faced post-incarceration. In addition, the prerequisites to custodial rights did not accurately capture good mothering as they defined it. The mothers viewed good mothering as being there for their children, which was not restricted to a constant physical presence but entailed an emotional connection of unconditional love and a communicative relationship where they were available to talk and listen when needed. Even though these were behaviors the women associated with being good mothers and that they prided themselves on, these acts were still insufficient to demonstrate maternal fitness to social services. Amidst the numerous strict requirements to gain custody of minor children, mothers often found themselves facing an uphill battle to be deemed fit. In addition, being under parole supervision was considered unpredictable, time-consuming, and composed of stipulations like curfews that were detrimental to efforts in regaining or enhancing mother-child relationships. Despite maternal desires to recover from substance use, social judgments and treatment interfered with the help and positive social support necessary to overcome histories of addiction. Insufficient finances and unemployment also contributed to strains when concerned about the effects of limited



funds on their children. These examples demonstrate how the formerly incarcerated mothers were faced with social and structural hindrances to enact their mothering ideals, and penalized when their own maternal ideals and definitions of “good” mothers did not coincide with preconceived notions of maternal fitness.

Such burdens in enacting motherhood post-incarceration sometimes provoked destructive setbacks in the mother’s reentry. The navigation of motherhood post-incarceration entailed somewhat of a trial and error that exposed the women to various complications in their reintegration. As Zalba (1964, p. 23) notes, a mother’s “separation from her children and the major changes in her role more directly strike at her personal identity and her self-image.” As I have demonstrated through my study, such a strike at identity may subsequently interfere with a woman’s sense of empowerment. For instance, conflicts between maternal ideals and maternal behaviors influenced feelings of maternal inadequacy that sometimes shaped a defeatist mentality in reentry efforts. Difficulties regaining or enhancing mother-child relationships while in recovery put mothers at risk of relapses, especially when they were still finding better coping mechanisms. Distressing custodial arrangements and the demands to regain custody often led mothers to feel overwhelmed in their ability to reintegrate back into community. Thus, even though children often encouraged reentry efforts, the women needed to overcome the various nuances in navigating motherhood in order to realistically ease their reintegration.

### **Comparative Analyses regarding Racial-Ethnic Background and Mother-Child Contact**

In this dissertation, I sought to address two primary questions thus far under-examined in the literature: first, what role does racial-ethnic background play in the post-incarceration motherhood experiences of African American, West Indian, and Hispanic

mothers? And, second, how does the navigation of post-incarceration motherhood vary among women with varying contact relationships with their children? I found that racial-ethnic background and the degree of mother-child contact shaped women's navigation of motherhood post-incarceration and their reintegration back into the community.

### **Racial-Ethnic Background**

Of my study participants, 21 identified with an African American background, 15 identified with a Hispanic background, and 8 identified with a West Indian background.<sup>1</sup> In Chapter Four, my investigation of the role of racial-ethnic background on mothering revealed that notions of “good” mothers were consistent across all three groups of African American, West Indian, and Hispanic women. Specifically, all three groups believed that “being there” for their children was indicative of good mothering behaviors and all three groups believed that maternal responsibilities and concerns about children distinguished their reentry experiences from formerly incarcerated women without children.

Though not a overarching theme of the larger study, the women discussed differential exposure to reentry challenges depending on the predominant ethnic group in neighborhoods where children lived. Living in predominantly African American neighborhoods added pressure for the mothers to purchase name brand items as a display of wealth. Failure to purchase the best and more expensive clothing items for their children in these neighborhoods was described as potentially exposing them to bullying from their peers. Yet, living in predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods was viewed as a

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<sup>1</sup> As explained in Chapter Three, and shown in Table 1, these numbers illustrate that some of the 37 participants described themselves as ethnically-mixed. In addition, one participant – Latoya – identified as Black but could not describe an ethnicity in which she identified.

protective factor against these pressures since there was perceivably less reliance on this portrayal of wealth. This may have implications in programmatic efforts to help mothers with budgeting since they may view these expenses as a need for their children's protection. This added pressure may also be detrimental amidst the financial problems typically faced post-incarceration, as described in Chapter Five.

Even though the African American, West Indian, and Hispanic mothers I spoke with shared a common interest to “be there” for their children post-incarceration and referred to shared obstacles in obtaining work as women of color emerging from in the criminal justice system, I discovered that they had unique experiences concerning employment and finances. The West Indian participants were more likely to be employed or interning at the time of their interview compared to the women of African American or Hispanic background. Chapter Five explores how race and ethnicity appeared to shape the nature of challenges concerning stereotypes and treatment while on the labor market, financial assistance from family members, and clashes in the workplace. While West Indians and African Americans are often lumped together by society as “Black” and their work experiences discussed collectively, this study demonstrates some quarrels between these groups. In fact, participants described clashes between these two ethnic groups that stemmed from stereotypes about work ethics. They discussed social perceptions of African Americans as dependent on welfare assistance. In contrast, they discussed social perceptions of West Indians as the “model minority” (see Waters, 1999) with better work-related habits compared to African Americans. The study participants believed these perceived differences in work ethics affected their progress in the labor market and influenced a tense workplace dynamic between African Americans and West Indians.

While West Indians were distinguished from African Americans according to these perceived differences in work ethics, West Indians and Hispanics were paralleled with each other in regards to cultural values about hard work and earned benefits. It was still a reality, however, that women of these racial-ethnic backgrounds had still engaged in illegitimate means of monetary gain. This contradicted notions of honorable work and was also grounds for West Indian and Hispanic family members to withhold support – an undesirable response from family during a time of need. Thus, while African Americans may be hurt by negative stereotypes of their work ethic and worthiness of being hired, West Indians and Hispanics may be affected by family disapproval of culturally unacceptable behaviors. Such familial disapproval, however, may not only arise in response to illegitimate means of monetary gain, as discussed in Chapter Five, but also in response to addiction histories, as discussed in Chapter Six.

In Chapter Six, I explore the role of racial-ethnic background in the participants' experiences concerning histories of addiction. Though the African American participants were more likely than the Hispanic and West Indian participants to have histories of addiction and to describe addiction as contributing to later offending, their narratives of addiction and recovery did not touch on culture or ethnic background as factors that shaped their experiences. In contrast, I found that compared to African American and Hispanic participants, the West Indian participants were least likely to describe histories of addiction.<sup>2</sup> According to Kleinman and Lukoff (1978), West Indians' cultural values about upward mobility may serve as a protective factor against substance use. Yet, the

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<sup>2</sup> Other scholars have also found this disparity in drug use across ethnic groups, including Kleinman and Lukoff (1978) in their article *Ethnic Differences in Factors Related to Drug Use*.

West Indian women in this study were not immune to addictions, and they discussed how a history of addiction was grounds for family detachment as a cultural transgression (see also Jean-Louis et al., 2001). Being “discarded” by family members and refused assistance may not only hurt recovery efforts, but may also deter women from seeking support and guidance in their reintegration. Thus, as noted above, such familial responses may be detrimental during women’s reentry when more assistance is crucial to reintegrating back into the community (Cobbina, 2010; Naser & La Vigne, 2006). In Chapter Seven, for instance, I demonstrate the influence of familial assistance in post-incarceration motherhood. My study participants considered family to be the primary resource for childcare help during and after their incarceration. Consequently, family was fundamental in avoiding (or delaying) children’s placement in the foster care system. Furthermore, the role of extended family was considered uniquely tailored for racial-ethnic minority women considering their exposure to unfortunate experiences like the absence of their children’s fathers and the overlap between the criminal justice system and child protective services.

### **Mother-Child Contact**

This study supports existing research that children may serve as motivators and motherhood may be associated with constructive changes in women’s behaviors post-incarceration (Brown & Bloom, 2009; Covington, 2003; Graham & Bowling, 1995; Hayes, 2009; Leverentz, 2014; Sharpe, 2015). As expected, however, the prominence of their maternal identities was associated with the degree of contact mothers had with their children, which in turn influenced how salient their maternal identities were in routine activities in their reentry. The following reviews the navigation of post-incarceration

motherhood among women with varying contact relationships with their children beginning with mothers who live with their children, followed by mothers who live separately from their children but maintain contact, and then mothers without contact with their children.

As noted in Chapter Three, 13 of the 37 mothers lived with at least one of their children (of all ages). I found that when the mothers were living with their children post-incarceration, maternal identities were often salient in their reentry whether through their everyday activities, their plans for the future, or their understanding of various circumstances they were grappling with. For instance, we might imagine that the additional expenses to support children would influence resentment towards maternal responsibilities after their imprisonment. Instead, I found that the salience of a maternal identity for formerly incarcerated mothers living with their children guided them through financial obstacles according to their personal ideals of a good mother. In Chapter Five, I demonstrated how living with children, particularly under-aged children, was instrumental in shaping the women's interpretations of negative financial circumstances by allowing them to perform maternal behaviors that were not dependent on finances, like communicating and spending quality time together. In Chapter Seven, I explored the women's narratives about needing to adjust to living with their children post-incarceration, but also in assisting their children through this transition as well.

It was most common for the mothers I spoke with to maintain some form of contact with their children without physically residing with them, which was a shared experience for 29 of the 37 mothers. In many ways mothers who lived separately from their children and maintained contact shared similarities with mothers who were living

with children. As shown in Chapter Four, both groups believed that, as formerly incarcerated mothers, they had more responsibilities to others upon their release compared to formerly incarcerated women without children. Specifically, I found that when mothers maintained contact with a child post-incarceration, regardless if they lived together or separately, this shaped their interests and concerns in the mother-child relationships and motivated reintegration efforts. This was demonstrated in Chapter Five as mothers who had contact with their children interpreted their financial difficulties through the lens of motherhood. With the exception of mothers who had contact with adult children with their own families, mothers discussed the additional strains to support under-aged children and the motivation to push through financial obstacles as role models to other adult children. In addition, despite living arrangements, reserving communication at least seemingly paved the way for mothers to recover from addiction histories. As described in Chapter Six, recovery efforts were driven by desires to enhance or mend mother-child relationships and to prevent potential relapses that could lead to more unfavorable circumstances in their reentry and for their children. Yet, even though navigating motherhood inspired mothers with contact to maintain sobriety, conflicts in navigating motherhood put them at greater risk of emotional turmoil, endangering recovery efforts particularly when the mothers were still learning coping mechanisms while managing motherhood.

Despite these similarities in the reentry experiences of mothers who had contact with their children despite living with or away from them, there were notable differences between these groups as well. For instance, as described in Chapter Four, mothers living separately from their children were more likely to discuss the negative impact of parole

restrictions on their lives as mothers. In addition, Chapter Seven explores how these mothers were driven to make adjustments in their overall life circumstances in order to create a comfortable home environment for their children prior to residing with them. When they were also trying to gain custody of under-aged children, these mothers found themselves needing to comply with numerous prerequisites within their personal lives (like drug treatment programs, parenting classes, and stable employment), but also within the living space designated for them and the children they hoped to gain custody of (like windows and window guards in each room of the home).

Of the mothers I spoke with, nine did not have contact with a child. Interestingly, I found meaningful differences in the navigation of motherhood when mothers had multiple children but did not have contact with at least one and when mothers did not have contact with their only child. Of the nine mothers without contact, two did not have contact with their only child and seven did not have contact with at least one of their multiple children. Thus, there were no mothers with multiple children who lacked communication with them all. When mothers maintained some form of communication with at least one of their multiple children, they were more likely to have salient maternal identities in everyday activities. This was possible since their navigation of motherhood (and their discussions of motherhood) were focused on children with whom they maintained contact.

When the women did not have contact with their only child, the maternal identity was less salient in day-to-day life. For these women, expressions of their “ideal self” (McCall & Simmons, 1966) did not directly relate to their maternal identity. In general, for those without any contact with their only child, there was less maternal conflict in the



face of reentry obstacles and, as a result, their maternal identities posed less risk of emotional turmoil. As described in Chapter Four, when mothers did not have contact with their only child, there was no mention of maternal responsibilities or concerns that distinguished their reentry experiences from non-mothers. In Chapter Five, my investigation revealed that their children were often missing from narratives about desires and decisions on the labor market and in the workplace, which focused on them instead.

Overall, it was more common to lack communication with adult children than with minor children under 18 years old. As noted in Chapter Four, when mothers did not have contact with adult children, they described expectations that those children would have grown out of feelings of anger, abandonment, and resentment. I also found that mothers without contact with under-aged children associated this lack of communication with the interference of child protective services and with caregivers who made temporary arrangements more permanent during the mothers' incarceration, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

### **The Resiliency of Maternal Identities Amidst Dissonance**

Irrespective of racial-ethnic background or degree of contact, mothers at times simultaneously met their maternal ideals while also contradicting them, which was typically due to a combination of social setbacks, structural obstacles and personal decisions. Yet, they described protective functions in which they still viewed themselves as good mothers even in the face of such dissonance.

Through my study, I found that when mothers had multiple children and did not have contact with at least one, their narratives of motherhood and reintegration did not include those children with whom they lacked contact. They diverted attention away from

their maternal disengagement and, instead, directed our discussions toward examples where they met their maternal ideals. This demonstrates the value of understanding things that are left unsaid within women's narratives. Specifically, by omitting examples of dissonance within their narratives, the women shaped presentations of themselves as doing a good job as mothers. The formerly incarcerated women, in essence, were able to emphasize meanings of motherhood that were associated with practical actions they performed post-incarceration.

When mothers in my study *did* make note of any dissonance between maternal ideals and what they were able to do, they typically disassociated themselves from being bad mothers altogether. The women described examples of clear dissonance as previous mistakes in the learning process of navigating motherhood. They often believed their "bad" mothering behaviors were not indicative of their overall character and, instead, understood unfortunate situations through the lens of being good mothers overall. Very rarely did the women view themselves as having been bad mothers but when they did, they typically had a history of addiction. Notably, however, even mothers with addiction histories considered this a phase in their lives that was in the past. This not only demonstrates the dynamic nature of "good" and "bad" mothering, but also demonstrates the resiliency of their maternal identities amidst dissonance. As found by Robison and Miller (2016, p. 335), mothers in the criminal justice system upheld identities as good mothers by unraveling social constructions of motherhood and "reimagin[ing] good mothering in ways that incorporated their histories of criminality and drug abuse and the separations and conflicts those actions incurred."

In Chapter Four, my investigation also discovered that mothers made efforts to compensate for adverse mothering behaviors with one child by making adjustments to meet personal ideals with subsequent children or grandchildren. In this way, having multiple children and grandchildren allowed the mothers to manage dissonance by focusing their attention on them as second chances to enact maternal ideals. Even though these efforts did not directly address any existing problems with their other children, it served as yet another protective method to manage dissonance and direct discussions toward examples where they met their maternal ideals.

Overall, there were a variety of ways in which the formerly incarcerated women were resilient in finding meaningful maternal identities even in the face of situations that could seemingly preclude it. The women, in essence, made efforts to latch onto positive representations of mothering behaviors, which reinforced their motherhood and the prominence of their maternal identities amidst the dissonance they encountered after incarceration.

### **Policy and Practical Implications**

Once society perceives mothers in the criminal justice system as having “spoiled identities” (Goffman, 1963), it is typically difficult for such women to disassociate themselves from these negative labels imposed upon them by society. Yet, the mothers in this study rejected these labels and, instead, made efforts hold onto positive identities as mothers. As McAdams (2008, p. 242) argues: “The stories people fashion to make meaning out of their lives serve to situate them within the complex social ecology of modern adulthood.” As such, these narratives may also serve to guide behaviors (McAdams, 1985; in Miller et al., 2015). Thus, practitioners should tap into the women’s

narratives to empower them through their reentry, but with special attention to offset the maternal conflicts in post-incarceration life that may hurt reintegration. While acknowledgement of their maternal identities and role as parents is a first step, in order for programs to be truly helpful there are several components they should have embedded within them.

First, programs for formerly incarcerated mothers should include specific efforts to learn about the personal hopes, plans, and obstacles faced by mothers in their reentry. As my study has revealed, women's reintegration post-incarceration is shaped by their navigation of motherhood. Thus, it is important that program staff understand the behaviors formerly incarcerated women deem meaningful to their maternal identity and it is also imperative that program staff are sensitive to the women's residential standing, custodial arrangements, and degree of contact with their children to better establish a nonjudgmental atmosphere. Programs should incorporate this information as a valuable asset in developing strategies and offering suggestions that embrace the women's personal interests and guide them through the associated obstacles.

In addition, efforts to expand work opportunities for formerly incarcerated mothers may be more effective if these efforts account for the role of maternal identities (and associated expectations) in women's decisions about work. For instance, work programs should be cognizant that formerly incarcerated mothers, like other mothers, may seek employment that is specifically conducive to their maternal identity when they have minor children. This may entail work that allows for pickup after school or daycare, that is understanding of sudden emergencies with children, and that offers enough pay to cover childcare costs like daycare. For nonresidential and noncustodial mothers, this also

entailed a work schedule that supported quality time with their children when most convenient for both parties (like weekends). Even though obtaining employment is a notable accomplishment after a bout of incarceration, work with unpredictable schedules, extended work hours into the night, mandatory weekends, and little leeway during family emergencies may introduce additional problems in navigating motherhood. Thus, not only is there a need for more employment opportunities that are receptive to employing formerly incarcerated individuals, but there is a need for work that is also suitable for mothers with minor children.

Similarly, efforts to expand housing opportunities for formerly incarcerated women should also take into account the significance of navigating motherhood in the women's wants and needs concerning living arrangements. There is a lack of housing to accommodate formerly incarcerated individuals not only in congested cities like New York City,<sup>3</sup> but across the United States as a whole. While there are several housing programs across the country for the general population and the formerly incarcerated, the women in my study received inadequate support both during and after their incarceration to find housing and to navigate the array of housing requirements when seeking custody of under-aged children. In fact, housing difficulties were evident during my initial data analysis since preliminary interviews revealed the impact of the shelter system on women's ability to mother, prompting the theoretical sampling of formerly incarcerated mothers with experiences of homelessness and stays in the shelter system. Thus, more attention should be given to viable pathways where women may secure suitable housing

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<sup>3</sup> During the month this study began, approximately 60,352 people were sleeping in New York City shelters and the Mayor, Bill de Blasio, had an agenda to tackle the city's extreme homelessness.

for themselves and their children. Such pathways would not only support women's reintegration, but may also work to detangle their involvement in the criminal justice system from their children's placement in the foster care system (or other, informal placements with family members).

Consistent with other research (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999; Humphrey, 2008; Snell & Morton, 1994; Staley, 2008), a number of the women I interviewed had histories of substance use. They believed treatment programs were counterproductive when program personnel were withdrawn from the women's life stories and knew them as merely numbers within program evaluations. Nonetheless, the formerly incarcerated mothers discussed a number of aspects within treatment programs that facilitated their recovery – aspects that should be widespread within such programs. For instance, program personnel should make efforts to help women within the realities of their own unique circumstances. This can be done by understanding the underlying situations that shaped their addictions, triggered their relapses and motivated their recovery, as well as by recognizing the role of maternal identities within these situations. The mothers I spoke with considered this approach to be intimate and most helpful in their recovery. This knowledge is particularly important since women may encounter maternal conflicts in navigating motherhood post-incarceration and program personnel are crucial to helping the women develop constructive coping mechanisms to life's stresses and avoid potential relapses. In addition to this understanding of life circumstances and the individualized guidance from program personnel, the women found it meaningful to have an open space to meet other women who overcame the hurdles of addiction and who served as living proof that they, too, could make progress. Thus, it may be worthwhile to support these

positive interactions within drug treatment programs since they facilitated the development of self-confidence and further encouraged the women's recovery.

Another challenge uncovered in this study was the use of scare tactics emphasizing the negative consequences of setbacks on the women's children. Instead, mothers should be given more positive reinforcements when they enact behaviors they deem valuable. Scholars like Michalsen (2011) note that difficulties in mothers' lives and maternal relationships complicate their post-incarceration experience. In fact, stripped or weakened motherhood may trigger hopelessness and self-deprecation in women (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Stenius et al., 2005; see also Foster, 2011), potentially hindering mothers' motivation and capacity to successfully reintegrate into the community. Thus, emphasizing unfortunate circumstances and the negative consequences for maternal desires and behaviors may be detrimental to women's reintegration. For instance, I found that mothers considered drug treatment programs to be counterproductive when they acted as yet another form of surveillance grounded in doubt about the mothers' recovery and emphasizing conflicts in enacting maternal ideals. Rather than programming that is oriented toward giving women warnings and reiterating the negative consequences of potential relapses, study participants noted the value of positive reinforcements from program staff who acknowledged progress in their recovery and reentry as whole. Positive reinforcements of positive events and circumstances may be more constructive in helping formerly incarcerated mothers than solely managing and controlling bad behaviors (see Ward & Maruna, 2007). Thus, accentuating the positive aspects of mother-child relationships and reinforcing their good features may serve as a form of empowerment in women's reentry. This includes recognition that "good" mother-child

relationships can come in diverse forms, and not simply traditional custodial or residential arrangements that adhere to notions of “intensive mothering” (see Hays, 1996).

As Ward and Maruna (2007) argue, it is crucial that the person’s own interests and priorities are taken into consideration in order to effectively support their reintegration and lower their chances of re-incarceration. I have presented various ways that programs and social practitioners may remain grounded in the realities of post-incarceration experiences for formerly incarcerated mothers and take a strengths-based approach in supporting the mothers in their reentry. By allowing these suggestions to emerge from the mothers’ narratives, this study can contribute to constructive social services for formerly incarcerated mothers. These women are already marginalized across both gender and racial-ethnic background, then stigmatized for challenging social norms of motherhood. Not only does helping the mothers create better circumstances for them to reintegrate and avoid a revolving door of incarceration, but the proper assistance may also help improve mother-child relationships and create better circumstances for their children as well.

### **Areas for Future Research**

In addition to insights for policy and practice, my study also suggests important areas for additional research. First, scholars should further explore the culturally based discussions that arose between the African American, Hispanic, and West Indian participants in this study. My research revealed that such cultural variations are important for better understanding the post-incarceration experiences of mothers of color. For example, future research should examine the cultural significance of hard work and



earned benefits amongst the West Indian and Hispanic populations. This knowledge, coupled with criminological literature, would provide a better understanding of factors shaping family assistance to those with financially driven crimes. In fact, family members' perceptions of acceptable behaviors and their reluctance to aid women with these types of criminal records may have serious implications when women are reintegrating back into the community and in need of a social support network. In addition, future research should also explore the cultural perceptions of substance abuse among the West Indian population and particularly for West Indian women. Due to cultural values that shape disassociation from those with addiction, it is possible that women of this ethnic background may feel discouraged from seeking assistance in their recovery. A closer examination of this may help improve outreach efforts to West Indians women in the criminal justice system. Likewise, future research should further inquire into the clashes between West Indians and African Americans in the labor market and in the work place that were said to stem from perceptions of work ethic. While existing research discusses the perceptions and treatment of each ethnic group by White employers (Foner, 1985; Model, 1995; Waters, 1999), the question remains of whether African Americans and West Indians miss out on work opportunities post-incarceration when those in charge may also be Black but are of the other ethnic background.

As these examples suggest, I urge researchers to be cognizant of limitations in their work that result from homogenizing the Black experience without recognition of ethnic nuances, which may appear small in nature from the outside but may have large affects on the life experiences of those being studied. Racial classifications along a Black/White dichotomy obscure the differences between African American, Hispanic and

West Indian groups. Comparatively examining reentry experiences across racial-ethnic groups, this allows for a better understanding of societal responses to formerly incarcerated individuals of different racial-ethnic backgrounds and a better understanding of the cultural principles that may impact familial responses to mothers' imprisonment. It is important to note that researchers may encounter obstacles recruiting an equal number of participants from each ethnic group – as was the case in this study – in order to conduct interviews. Through this study, I learned that this West Indian population is “so down low” because of the “high level of intolerance” for substance use and incarceration.<sup>4</sup> Thus, focus groups with the larger ethnic population would be an ideal method to gather information about the cultural mechanisms at play while also eluding recruitment issues from recruiting this group directly.

In addition, my study raises important questions for future research about how motherhood impacts the post-incarceration experience of women with children of different ages. In my study, the average age of the women's children was approximately 19 years old.<sup>5</sup> Though my findings suggest that motherhood matters regardless of the children's ages, *how* it mattered differed by whether the children were minors or adults. Thus, it may be valuable to focus even more attention to women with children who are, on average, much younger in age. Women, in general, typically face increased maternal expectations and demands during the early developmental stages in their children's lives. It is possible that mothers may be more ambivalent towards motherhood when their

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<sup>4</sup> These accounts were gathered during informal discussions throughout the recruitment process.

<sup>5</sup> This excludes seven under-aged children whose exact ages were unknown by their mother, Paloma.

children are the most dependent and demanding, and mothers are especially vulnerable to emotional turmoil (see Brown, 2011; Raphael-Leff, 2010; Rich, 1995). The concept of maternal ambivalence captures the reality that mothering may not come naturally for women, and entails an adjustment to motherhood. As Adrienne Rich writes in *Of Woman Born*:

My children cause me the most exquisite suffering of which I have any experience. It is the suffering of ambivalence: the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves, and blissful gratification and tenderness (Rich, 1995, p. 21).

In her book, Rich discusses her own experiences with motherhood and includes entries from her personal journal to illustrate feelings of entrapment as her needs were in a losing battle against the needs of her children. Yet, the adaptation to motherhood is not context-free and may be shaped by social and practical factors in women's lives like finances and living arrangements. Thus, future research should look more closely at the navigation of motherhood when the formerly incarcerated mothers have very young children, such as newborns and infants. It is possible that this population may be at greater risk of maternal ambivalence due to the increased demands of young children and the collateral consequences of incarceration, but it is also possible that the role of extended family may be a protective factor for women of African American, Hispanic, and West Indian background.

In addition, while my study focused specifically on formerly incarcerated mothers, it may be especially fruitful to explore how the navigation of post-incarceration motherhood is understood and experienced from the perspective of both major parties involved – the formerly incarcerated mothers and their children. According to Strom et al. (2008, p. 527), “many parents want to understand how their children judge them

because they recognize that success as a family member cannot be defined by only one generation.” Children often function as evaluators of parental success and, thus, efforts at self-improvement may be contingent on the children’s experiences and judgments (Weiss et al., 2005; as cited in Strom et al., 2008). As I have demonstrated in this work, the mothers found value in positive remarks and praise from their children, which not only reinforced their maternal identities but also encouraged reentry efforts. Yet, while women may note their maternal decisions and hopes in navigating motherhood, children may have varying interpretations of their mothers’ actions and the mother-child relationships as a whole. Thus, there is value in incorporating the children’s narratives to provide further insight into the context in which mothers navigate motherhood.

### **Closing Remarks**

This study highlights how the navigation of motherhood may influence various aspects of mothers’ lives post-incarceration, shaping their reintegration. In doing so, I not only provide insight into the meanings, expectations and experiences of motherhood among formerly incarcerated women, but I also unpack the experiences of women in racial-ethnic groups that are often viewed collectively as minorities. I urge scholars to expand on this study and specifically explore the experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers, consider the influence of motherhood in women’s reentry, acknowledge the nuances of reintegration across varying racial-ethnic groups, and incorporate this knowledge into gender-responsive efforts that are grounded in the realities of these experiences. Until then, reentry programs may be limited in their assistance for formerly incarcerated mothers.

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## APPENDIX A

## INTERVIEW GUIDE – ENGLISH

***Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. I will begin with some basic demographic questions.***

1. How would you describe your race? Ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Which neighborhood do you currently live in? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you currently live with anyone? If so, who? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. What is your current living arrangement? [i.e., own apartment/house, transitional home, friend/family] \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is the furthest you have gotten in school? \_\_\_\_\_
6. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. How old are they? \_\_\_\_\_
    - i. IF MINORS: Do you have custody? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Are there any other children that you are involved in raising or have been involved in raising? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you have an intimate partner? Man or woman? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. IF YES: Is this the father of your child(ren)? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. IF YES: Married? \_\_\_\_\_

***Now, I would like to know more about your point of view.***

- ❖ Can you describe some things you currently do as a mother?
- ❖ Can you explain what is expected of you as a mother? How do you feel about these expectations?
  - Have these expectations changed over time?
- ❖ Can you describe your definition of a mother? In your opinion, what makes for a good mother? What makes for a bad mother?
  - Are there things that only mothers can give and do for their children?

***Now, I want to ask you some questions about your experience with the criminal justice system.***

- ❖ You were found eligible to be interviewed because you have a previous experience with incarceration. Can you tell me what brought you to prison?
- ❖ Have you been incarcerated more than once?
  - IF YES: How many times?
  - When were you (last) incarcerated? What was the charge? How long were you (last) incarcerated?
- ❖ How old were your children when you were [last] incarcerated?
- ❖ How did your family feel about the specific charge? The incarceration?
  - Do you think this would differ for West Indian/African American/Hispanic families?

**MOTHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS:**

- ❖ Can you describe the relationship you had with your child(ren) *prior to your incarceration*?
  - Did you live with your children?
    - IF NO: Who did they live with? Where did you live?
  - How often did you see your children?
  - Did you have custody of your minor children?
    - IF NO: Who did?
  - How do you think your children would describe the relationship prior to your incarceration?
    - IF MORE THAN ONE CHILD: Do you think this would differ between your children? How?
- ❖ Can you describe the relationship you had with your children *during your incarceration*?
  - Who was your child(ren) living with while you were away? How did you feel about that?
    - How did you decide where to place your children? Did you feel you had good options? How did your child feel about that arrangement?
    - What were the pros and cons of placing your children with this person?
      - African-American and Hispanic children seem to be more likely to live with relatives while White kids seem more likely to go into foster care or live with fathers. Can you explain why you think this happens?
  - How often did you see your children? Keep in touch with your children? By phone or mail?
  - How would you describe a mother's experience in prison in comparison to a father's experience in prison?
  - How do you think your children would describe the relationship during your incarceration?
    - IF MORE THAN ONE CHILD: Do you think this would differ between your different children? How?
- ❖ Before your release, what expectations did you have for when you returned? Did your expectations become a reality?

***Now, I would like to ask you some questions specific to your experience since your return.***

- ❖ First, I would like to know how long has it been since you were incarcerated?
  - IF IN PRISON: Are you still on parole? What were conditions of parole? How did you feel about this?
    - How would you describe the impact of parole on your relationship with your child(ren)?
- ❖ How do people react when they learn that you were locked up? How do people react when they learn that you were locked up and you also have children?
- ❖ Can you describe what it's like to be a mother who has been incarcerated?
  - Do you think your identity as a mother has influenced certain things



- you've done since you've been released?
  - Do you think mothers try to make up for the fact that they were in prison?
- ❖ What is it like for you as an African American / West Indian / Hispanic mother who has been incarcerated?
- ❖ How is the experience after prison different for women with children in comparison to women without children?
  - Do you think the experience after prison is different for mothers in comparison to fathers?

#### PARENTING:

- ❖ What makes things harder to be a good mother after incarceration? What makes things easier to be a good mother after incarceration?
- ❖ Can you describe the relationship you had with your children (or other children you were involved in raising) when you were first released? Today?
  - How do you think your relationship with your children has changed from the time you were first released to today?
  - How involved would you say you are in making decisions concerning your children? Can you provide examples?
- ❖ Who has played the most vital role in helping to raise your children?
- ❖ How would your children describe their relationship with you when you were first released? Today?
  - IF MORE THAN ONE CHILD: Do you think this would differ between your different children? How?
  - If your child was asked to describe your parenting in one word, what do you think he/she would say?
- ❖ What has been the greatest challenge you've faced as a mother since your release? What do your children think about this challenge?
- ❖ What has been the most pleasing moment you've experienced as a mother since your release? Do your children know that you consider this your most pleasing moment as a mother?
- ❖ How important is your ethnicity in terms of how you raise your child(ren)?
  - What cultural traditions, if any, do you use as a mother? Try to show or teach your child(ren)?

#### HOUSING:

- ❖ When you were first released, where did you live? Was this an option of yours or was this mandatory?
  - IF MANDATORY: How did that make you feel?
  - IF OPTION: Was there a particular reason why you decided to live there? Were your children a reason?
  - How did living there make your children feel? How often did you see your children?
  - Was living with your children a priority to you when you were released? Is it a priority now?
- ❖ Do you live in the same place now? Do you hope to make changes in where or with whom you live? Explain.

- ❖ Who are your children living with now?
  - IF PARTICIPANT: Are there things that your children are missing while they are living with you?
  - IF SOMEONE ELSE: Are there things that you think your children are missing while they are living with someone else?
  - Can you describe how your children feel about their current living arrangements?
- ❖ People often debate whether or not a woman must live with her children in order to be a good mother. What do you think?

#### CUSTODY/FAMILY:

- ❖ IF NO CUSTODY OF MINOR CHILDREN (now or when minors):
  - Was getting custody of your children a priority to you when you were released?
  - Have any of your children been adopted? What was your role in this process?
  - Do (Did) your children understand that you are their mother even though someone else is (was) taking care of them?
  - Is child welfare involved? How? How did you feel about this?
    - Can you tell me about your experiences dealing with child welfare? What has it been like?
    - How would you describe the role of child welfare in your current relationship with your child(ren)?
    - Do you feel like you need to prove to them that you are a good mother? How do you do this?
- ❖ Do you think someone can be a good mother even if she does not have custody of her under-aged children?
  - Have you heard of instances where children call other women “Mom”? How do you think that happens?
- ❖ What kinds of obligations do you think family members should have for each other?
  - How comfortable are you asking your family for help?
- ❖ How would you say your involvement in criminal activity or your incarceration affected your place within your family?
  - In terms of your family and friends, do you feel like you need to prove to them that you’re a good mother? Why? How do you do this?

#### INTIMATE PARTNERS:

- ❖ How important are your children’s feelings in deciding whom you become intimately involved with?
  - How important is someone’s feelings towards your children in deciding whom to become intimately involved with?
- ❖ Can you describe your current relationship with the father of your children? Is the father(s) of your children involved with the children?
  - How do your children feel towards their father?

- ❖ IF INTIMATE PARTNER NOT CHILDREN'S FATHER: How did you and your current partner meet? How would you describe your relationship with your partner?
  - How would you describe the relationship between your partner and your children? Is your partner involved with the children?
  - How does your partner feel about your children? How do your children feel about your partner?
- ❖ IF INTIMATE PARTNER IS A WOMAN: How does your family respond to your partner being a female? How does your child(ren) respond?
  - Are there any unique challenges you face because your partner is a woman?
- ❖ Some studies show that Black women in the system are more likely to never be married while White women are more likely to be divorced. Do you have any ideas why that is?
  - What should a marriage look like? What is a bad marriage?
  - How important is marriage to you? How important is marriage for your children?

#### RECOVERY:

- ❖ Have you ever had experiences with drug or alcohol use?
- ❖ IF DRUGS/ALCOHOL USE: Can you describe what this experience was like? Did the use affect your relationship with your children? How did your children feel about your use?
  - Can you describe your experience since your release as a mother in recovery? Do your children know about your recovery efforts? How do they feel about this?
  - Are you or have you ever been in a drug program? Can you describe your experience in the program?
    - Has this influenced your relationship with your child(ren) in any way?
- ❖ People often discuss whether or not a woman can be a good mother while using drugs or alcohol. What do you think?
  - Do you think someone can still be a good mother if she is in recovery? Can you provide an example?

#### EDUCATION/EMPLOYMENT:

- ❖ Do you have any plans regarding school?
  - IF NO: Any reason?
  - IF YES: What are your plans? What motivated you to make these plans? Was going to school a priority to you when you were released?
  - How do your children feel about this?
- ❖ Are you currently working?
  - Has this influenced your relationship with your child(ren) in any way?
- ❖ What would be your ideal work situation? What would be your minimum criteria?
- ❖ Do you have any plans regarding work? [i.e., stay at same job, switch jobs, get job, etc.]

- IF NO: Any reason?
- IF YES: What are your plans? What motivated you to make these plans?  
Was going to work a priority to you when you were released?
- How do your children feel about this?

***We are about to wrap up the interview. I just have a few concluding questions.***

- ❖ How would you describe your neighborhood?
  - Can you describe any services, organizations, or groups *in your neighborhood* that help mothers recently released from prison?
  - Since your release, have you taken advantage of any services for the benefit of your children?
  - What more can be done to help mothers coming out of prison?
- ❖ Do you think your children are aware of the things you are trying to do for them?
  - How do you think this knowledge affects what they think of you? How do you think this knowledge affects how they feel about you?
- ❖ What's your biggest concern about your children? If you were given one wish as a mother, what would you wish for?
- ❖ What suggestions/advice would you give to mothers returning home?

***That is the end of our interview. Is there anything else you would like to say or ask?***

## APPENDIX B

## INTERVIEW GUIDE – SPANISH

***Gracias por aceptar a hablar conmigo. Voy a comenzar con algunas preguntas demográficas.***

1. ¿Cómo describes su raza? Etnicidad? \_\_\_\_\_
2. ¿Cuántos años tiene usted? \_\_\_\_\_
3. ¿Cuál comunidad vives en este momento? \_\_\_\_\_
4. ¿Vives con alguien en este momento? ¿Quién? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. ¿Qué es su situación de vivienda en este momento? [es decir, propia apartamento/casa, casa de transición, amigo/familia] \_\_\_\_\_
5. ¿Qué es lo más legos que has llegado en la escuela? \_\_\_\_\_
6. ¿Cuántos hijos usted tiene? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. ¿Cuántos años tienen? \_\_\_\_\_
    - i. SI MENORES DE EDAD: ¿Tienes custodia/tutela? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. ¿Hay otros niños que usted está envuelto en la crianza o ha estado envuelto en la crianza? \_\_\_\_\_
7. ¿Tienes usted una pareja íntima? Hombre o mujer? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. SI EN CASO: ¿Es el padre de sus hijos? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. SI EN CASO: ¿Estas casada? \_\_\_\_\_

***Ahora me gustaría saber más de su punto de vista.***

- ❖ ¿Puede describir algunas cosas que usted hace presentemente/actualmente como una madre?
- ❖ ¿Puedes explicar que se espera de usted como una madre? ¿Cómo sientes sobre estos expectativas/expectativas?
  - ¿Estas expectativas/expectativas han cambiado con el tiempo?
- ❖ ¿Puedes describir su definición de una madre? En su opinión, ¿qué es lo que hace una mujer ser buena madre? ¿Qué es lo que hace una mujer ser madre mala?
  - ¿Hay cosas que sólo las madres pueden dar y hacer por sus hijos?

***Ahora, quiero hacerle algunas preguntas sobre su experiencia con el sistema de justicia criminal/penal.***

- ❖ Fuiste elegible para ser entrevistada porque tienes experiencia con encarcelamiento/encierro. ¿Me puedes decir que te trajo a la cárcel/prisión?
- ❖ ¿Ha estado presa/encarcelada/aprisionada más de una vez?
  - SI EN CASO: ¿Cuántas veces?
  - ¿Cuándo fue su (último) encarcelamiento/encierro? ¿Que fue la cargo/acusación penal? ¿Por cuánto tiempo estabas presa/encarcelada/aprisionada (la última vez)?
- ❖ ¿Cuántos años tenían sus hijos cuando usted fue presa/encarcelada/aprisionada (la última vez)? ¿Cuántos años tenían sus hijos cuando usted salió de la cárcel/prisión?
- ❖ ¿Cómo sintieron su familia sobre el cargo específico? El encarcelamiento/encierro?

- ¿Crees que esto sería diferente para las familias caribeñas / afroamericanos / hispanas?

#### RELACIONES DE MADRE E HIJO:

- ❖ ¿Puedes describir la relación que tuviste con su hijo(s) *antes de su encarcelamiento/encierro*?
  - ¿Estabas viviendo con sus hijos?
    - SI NO: ¿Con quién estaban viviendo ellos? ¿Dónde estaban viviendo usted?
  - ¿Con que frecuencia viste a sus hijos?
  - ¿Usted tenía custodia/tutela de sus hijos menores de edad?
    - SI NO: ¿Quién tenía custodia/tutela?
  - ¿Cómo crees que sus hijos describirían la relación antes de su encarcelamiento/encierro?
    - SI TIENE MAS DE UN HIJO: ¿Crees que eso va ser diferente entre sus hijos? ¿Cómo?
- ❖ ¿Puedes describir la relación que tuviste con su hijo(s) *durante su encarcelamiento/encierro*?
  - ¿Con quién estaban viviendo sus hijos cuando usted no estaba? ¿Cómo sentía usted de esto?
    - ¿Cómo decidiste donde poner sus hijos? ¿Sentiste como tenia opciones buenas? ¿Cómo sintieron sus hijos sobre ese arreglo/acuerdo?
    - ¿Cuáles fueron los beneficios y los contras de tener sus hijos con esta persona?
      - Los niños afroamericanos e hispanos parecen ser más inclinados/pronos a vivir con sus familia/parientes mientras que los niños blancos parecen más inclinados/pronos a entrar en acogimiento con padres de crianza o vivir con los padres. ¿Puede explicar por qué cree que sucede esto?
  - ¿Con que frecuencia viste a sus hijos? ¿Con que frecuencia mantuviste contacto con sus hijos? ¿Por teléfono o por correo?
  - ¿Cómo describiría la experiencia de una madre en la cárcel/prisión en comparación con la experiencia de un padre en la cárcel/prisión?
  - ¿Cómo crees que sus hijos describirían la relación durante su encarcelamiento/encierro?
    - SI TIENE MAS DE UN HIJO: ¿Crees que eso va ser diferente entre sus hijos? ¿Cómo?
- ❖ Antes de su liberación, ¿qué expectativas/expectativas tenías para cuándo regresaste? ¿Sus expectativas/expectativas se hicieron realidad?

#### ***Ahora, me gustaría hacerle preguntas específico a su experiencia desde su regreso.***

- ❖ Primero, me gustaría saber ¿cuánto tiempo ha pasado desde que estaba en la cárcel/prisión?

- SI EN PRISIÓN: ¿Sigue en libertad condicional (“parole”)? ¿Cuáles fueron las condiciones de la libertad condicional (“parole”)? ¿Cómo te sentiste al respecto?
  - ¿Cómo describiría el impacto de eso en su relación con sus hijos?
- ❖ ¿Como reaccionan la gente cuando se dan cuenta que usted estaba en la cárcel/prisión? ¿Como reaccionan la gente cuando se dan cuenta que usted estaba en la cárcel/prisión y también tiene hijos?
- ❖ ¿Puede describir como usted siente al ser una madre que ha estado en la cárcel/prisión?
  - ¿Crees que su identidad como madre ha influido/afectado ciertas cosas que usted ha hecho desde su liberación?
  - ¿Crees que las madres tratan de corregir/compensar el hecho de que estaban en la cárcel/prisión?
- ❖ ¿Cómo es para usted como una madre afroamericana / caribeña / hispana que ha estado presa/encarcelada/aprisionada?
- ❖ ¿Cómo es la experiencia después de la cárcel/prisión diferente para las mujeres con hijos, en comparación con las mujeres sin hijos?
  - ¿Crees que la experiencia después de la cárcel/prisión es diferente para las madres en comparación con los padres?

#### LA CRIANZA:

- ❖ ¿Que hace las cosas más difíciles para ser una buena madre después de encarcelamiento/encierro? ¿Que hace las cosas más fáciles para ser una buena madre después de su encarcelamiento/encierro?
- ❖ ¿Puede describir la relación que tuviste con sus hijos (u otros niños con quien usted estuviste envuelto en la crianza) cuando fuiste liberada inicialmente? Hoy en día?
  - ¿Crees que su relación con sus hijos ha cambiado desde el momento en que fuiste liberada inicialmente hasta hoy en día?
  - ¿Cómo incluida/envuelta dirías que estás en asiendo decisiones con respecto a sus hijos? ¿Puede dar ejemplos?
- ❖ ¿Quién ha jugado el papel más importante en ayudar a criar a sus hijos?
- ❖ ¿Cómo describirían sus hijos la relación contigo cuando fuiste liberada inicialmente? ¿Hoy en día?
  - SI TIENE MAS DE UN HIJO: ¿Crees que eso va ser diferente entre sus hijos? ¿Cómo?
  - Si se le pidió a su hijo/a que describa usted le crió/cuidó/atendió en una palabra, ¿qué crees que él/ella diría?
- ❖ ¿Cuál ha sido el mayor desafío/reto/provocación que ha enfrentado como madre desde su liberación? ¿Qué piensan sus hijos de este desafío/reto/provocación?
- ❖ ¿Cuál ha sido el momento más agradable/amable que usted ha tenido/pasado/vivido como una madre desde su liberación? ¿Saben sus hijos que usted considera esto como el momento más agradable/amable como una madre?
- ❖ ¿Qué tan importante es su etnicidad en cómo criar a sus hijos?
  - ¿Qué tradiciones culturales, si los hay, usa usted como madre? ¿Qué tradiciones culturales trates de mostrar o enseñar a sus hijos?

### VIVIENDAS:

- ❖ Cuando fue liberada inicialmente, ¿dónde viviste? ¿Fue esta una opción de suya o era obligatoria/forzada?
  - SI OBLIGATORIA/FORZADA: ¿Cómo te hizo sentir eso?
  - SI OPCION: ¿Hubo alguna razón en particular por qué usted decidió vivir allí? ¿Fueron sus hijos una razón?
  - ¿Cómo sentían sus hijos con vivir allí? ¿Con que frecuencia viste a sus hijos?
  - ¿Era una prioridad/precedencia para usted para vivir con sus hijos cuando fuiste liberada? ¿Es una prioridad/precedencia ahora?
- ❖ ¿Usted vive en el mismo lugar ahora? ¿Esperas hacer cambios en dónde o con quién vives? Explique.
- ❖ ¿Con quien están viviendo sus hijos ahora?
  - SI CON LA PARTICIPANTE: ¿Hay cosas que les falta a sus hijos mientras que ellos están viviendo con usted?
  - SI CON OTRA PERSONA: ¿Hay cosas que les falta a sus hijos mientras que ellos están viviendo con otra persona?
  - ¿Puede describir cómo sus hijos se sienten de sus arreglos de vivienda?
- ❖ La gente muchas veces debaten/discuten si una mujer tiene que vivir con sus hijos para ser una buena madre. ¿Qué piensa usted?

### CUSTODIA/FAMILIA:

- ❖ SI NO TIENE CUSTODIA DE LOS HIJOS MENORES DE EDAD (ahora o cuando menores de edad):
  - ¿Era una prioridad/precedencia para usted para obtener la custodia de sus hijos cuando fuiste liberada?
  - ¿Alguno de sus hijos fueron adoptado? ¿Cuál fue su papel en este proceso?
  - ¿Sus hijos entienden (entendían) que usted eres la madre de ellos a pesar de que otra persona se hace cargo (estaban haciendo cargo) de ellos?
  - ¿Esta envuelto el “Child Welfare” (el agencia del bienestar de menores)? ¿Cómo? ¿Cómo te sentiste al respecto?
    - ¿Me puede decir de sus experiencias con ellos? ¿Qué ha sido?
    - ¿Cómo describiría el papel de ellos en su relación presentemente con su hijo/a?
    - ¿Se siente como que necesita demostrarles que eres una buena madre? ¿Cómo se hace esto?
- ❖ ¿Cree usted que alguien puede ser una buena madre aunque no tiene la custodia de su niños que son menores de edad?
  - ¿Has oído de casos en que los niños llaman a otras mujeres "mamá"? ¿Cómo crees que sucede eso?
- ❖ ¿Qué tipos de obligaciones cree que los miembros de la familia tienen el uno para el otro? ¿Qué tan comfortable te sienta a preguntar a tu familia por ayuda?
- ❖ ¿Cómo diría que su participación en actividades criminales o su encarcelamiento/encierro afectaron su lugar dentro de su familia?



- A respecto a su familia y amigos, ¿usted siente como tiene que demostrarles que eres una buena madre? ¿Por qué? ¿Cómo haces esto?

#### PAREJA INTIMA:

- ❖ ¿Cómo tan importante son los sentimientos de tus hijos para usted para decidir la persona con quién te involucras/envuelves íntimamente?
  - ¿Que tan importante seria para usted los sentimientos de una persona con que usted estaría envuelta sobre tus hijos?
- ❖ ¿Puede describir su relación presentemente con el padre de sus hijos? ¿El padre (los padres) esta(n) involucrado(s)/implicado(s) con los niños?
  - ¿Cómo sienten sus hijos sobre el padre de ellos?
- ❖ SI PAREJA INTIMA NO ES PADRE DE LOS NINOS: ¿Cómo se conocieron usted y su presente pareja? ¿Cómo describiría su relación con su pareja?
  - ¿Cómo describirías la relación entre su pareja y sus hijos? ¿Su pareja está involucrado/implicado con los niños?
  - ¿Cómo siente su pareja sobre los hijos suyos? ¿Cómo sienten sus hijos sobre su pareja?
- ❖ SI PAREJA INTIMA ES MUJER: ¿Cómo su familia responde a su pareja ser mujer? ¿Cómo responde sus hijos?
  - ¿Existen retos/desafíos únicos que usted enfrenta porque su pareja es una mujer?
- ❖ Algunos estudios muestran que las mujeres en el sistema de raza negra son más probable no casarse aunque las mujeres de raza blanca son más probable ser divorciadas. ¿Tiene alguna idea por qué es?
  - ¿Cómo debería parecer un matrimonio? ¿Qué es un matrimonio malo?
  - ¿Qué importancia tiene el matrimonio a usted? ¿Cómo de importante es el matrimonio para sus hijos?

#### RECUPERACION:

- ❖ ¿Ha tenido experiencias con el uso de drogas o alcohol?
- ❖ SI USO DE DRUGS/ALCOHOL: ¿Puede describir como fue esta experiencia? ¿El uso afectó su relación con sus hijos? ¿Cómo sintieron sus niños sobre su uso?
  - ¿Puede describir su experiencia desde su liberación como madre en recuperación? ¿Sus hijos saben de sus esfuerzos/intentos de recuperación? ¿Cómo sienten ellos con respecto a esto?
  - ¿Está o ha estado alguna vez en una programa de drogas? ¿Puede describir su experiencia en ese programa?
    - ¿Eso ha influido su relación con sus hijos de alguna manera?
- ❖ La gente muchas veces habla si una mujer puede ser madre buena mientras usando drogas o alcohol. ¿Qué piensa usted?
  - ¿Cree usted que alguien todavía puede ser una buena madre si ella está en recuperación? ¿Puede dar un ejemplo?

#### EDUCACION/EMPLEO:

- ❖ ¿Tiene algún plan con respecto a la escuela?
  - SI NO: ¿Una razón?

- SI EN CASO: ¿Cuáles son sus planes? ¿Qué te motivó a hacer estos planes? Ir a la escuela era una prioridad/precedencia para usted cuando fuiste liberado?
- ¿Cómo se sienten sus hijos de esto?
- ❖ ¿Estas trabajando en este momento?
  - ¿Eso ha influido su relación con sus hijos de alguna manera?
- ❖ ¿Cuál sería su situación de trabajo perfecta/ideal/maravillosa? ¿Cuáles serían sus criterios mínimos?
- ❖ ¿Tienes algunos planes sobre trabajo? [es decir, quedarse en el mismo trabajo, cambiar de trabajo, conseguir trabajo, etc.]
  - SI NO: ¿Una razón?
  - SI EN CASO: ¿Cuáles son sus planes? ¿Qué te motivó a hacer estos planes? Ir a trabajar era una prioridad/precedencia para usted cuando fuiste liberado?
  - ¿Cómo se sienten sus hijos de esto?

***Estamos a punto de terminar la entrevista. Tengo algunas preguntas finales.***

- ❖ ¿Cómo describiría su barrio/comunidad/vecindario?
  - ¿Puede describir cualquier servicio, organizaciones o grupos *en su* barrio/comunidad/vecindario que ayudan a las madres recién liberados de la cárcel/prisión?
  - Desde su lanzamiento, ¿ha tomado provecho/ventaja de cualquiera de los servicios para el beneficio de sus hijos?
  - ¿Qué más se puede hacer para ayudar a las madres saliendo de la cárcel/prisión?
- ❖ ¿Cree que sus hijos saben de las cosas que estás tratando de hacer por ellos?
  - ¿Cómo cree que este conocimiento afecta a lo que piensan de ti? ¿Cómo cree que este conocimiento afecta cómo ellos sienten sobre usted?
- ❖ ¿Cuál es tu mayor miedo/preocupación/ansiedad por sus hijos? Si te dieran un deseo como madre, ¿qué deseas/pides?
- ❖ ¿Qué sugerencias/consejos le daría a las madres regresando a casa?

***Ese es el final de nuestra entrevista. ¿Hay algo más que le gustaría decir o preguntar?***

## APPENDIX C

## RECRUITMENT FLYER – ENGLISH

## LOOKING FOR PARTICIPANTS:

Study on Women's Experiences with Motherhood After Incarceration


*Your experience is of interest!!!*

**Qualifications:**

- Mothers (Age 18+)
- Released From  
Prison/Jail
- Living in NYC
- Black or Hispanic

**Compensation (1 of 4):**

- \$25 Metro Card
- \$25 Pathmark Gift Card
- \$25 Staples Gift Card
- \$25 Duane Reade/Walgreens Gift Card



✍ No need to live with  
your children

✍ No need to have  
custody of your children

***Interested participants, please contact Janet Garcia:  
(¡Se habla español!)***

Janet.Garcia@rutgers.edu (917) – 402 – 4385	Janet.Garcia@rutgers.edu (917) – 402 – 4385	Janet.Garcia@rutgers.edu (917) – 402 – 4385	Janet.Garcia@rutgers.edu (917) – 402 – 4385	Janet.Garcia@rutgers.edu (917) – 402 – 4385	Janet.Garcia@rutgers.edu (917) – 402 – 4385	Janet.Garcia@rutgers.edu (917) – 402 – 4385	Janet.Garcia@rutgers.edu (917) – 402 – 4385	Janet.Garcia@rutgers.edu (917) – 402 – 4385	Janet.Garcia@rutgers.edu (917) – 402 – 4385
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Photo retrieved from Microsoft Word Clip Art Gallery.  
Flyer created by Janet Garcia-Hallett.

## APPENDIX D

## RECRUITMENT FLYER – SPANISH

**BUSCANDO PARTICIPANTES:**

Un Estudio de las Experiencias de las Mujeres sobre  
la Maternidad después de la Encarcelación

*Su experiencia merece interés!!!*

**Condiciones**

- Madre (18 años y más)
- Liberada de la cárcel (prisión)
- Viviendo en NYC (la Ciudad de Nueva York)
- Afro-descendiente o Hispana

**Compensación (1 de 4):**

- \$25 Tarjeta de Metro
- \$25 Tarjeta de Regalo para Pathmark
- \$25 Tarjeta de Regalo para Staples
- \$25 Tarjeta de Regalo para Duane Reade/Walgreens

✍ No tienes que vivir con sus hijos

✍ No tienes que tener custodia de sus hijos

***Participantes interesados deben ponerse en contacto con Janet Garcia:  
(English is spoken!)***

Janet.Garcia@rutgers.edu  
(917) – 402 – 4385

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