

Institute for Clinical Social Work

Making Sense: The Untold Stories of Parental Incarceration

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By

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Abstract

This study describes the lived experience of having a parent or parental figure incarcerated during one's adolescence. Using transcendental phenomenology, a textural-structural analysis unearthed five findings from 15 in-depth, in-person, semi-structured interviews with six urban participants between the ages of 18 and 29. There are many impacts of parental incarceration: developmental, social, emotional, and spiritual. These impacts influence the last finding, which is the level of adaptation. This study highlights the losses, traumas, developmental turns, and issues with attachment that face adolescents with an incarcerated parent or parental figure. In conclusion, there are clinical and social justice implications that will further clinical work done with this population. However, future research is still needed to better understand this phenomenon.

For those who have lost.

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Chapter I

Introduction

General Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the lived experience of having a parent (or parental figure)¹ incarcerated during one's adolescence. The objective was to reveal the subjective experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence. This study achieved the following goals: to describe the lived experiences of the adolescent who has an incarcerated parent; to describe the stresses on the adolescent and parent-child relationship when a parent was incarcerated; to expand the social work repertoire for working with this vulnerable population and their subsequent caregivers; and to expand the clinical knowledge of the problems that face youth whose parents were incarcerated and the subsequent caregivers who care for these youth.

Significance of Study for Clinical Social Work

By studying the experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence the study had a chance to improve social work research, policy, practice, and delivery to these populations. The phenomenological nature of this study allowed for the

¹ In the interest of brevity, going forward "parent" is used to stand for both parent and parental figure.

participants to reflect on their experience and what different relationships or services could have helped them at that time. Social workers and social service agencies who currently work directly with the adolescent population and with families that experience parental incarceration could use the new knowledge when working with these populations. It also provides the social workers who serve adolescents a better understanding of the issues currently facing this population in relation to the adolescent's development into adulthood.

Along with influencing social workers and social service agencies that work with adolescents or families experiencing parental incarceration, this research could help groups advocating for policy change. Over the past forty years, state and federal criminal justice policies have included mandatory sentencing based on guidelines for "dangerous" criminals that was aimed at catching high-profile drug dealers, violent criminals, and repeat offenders (Lynch & Sabol, 1997). However, these policies ended up incarcerating lower level drug dealers, drug users, and less violent or less "dangerous" criminals. As a result, these mandatory minimums inadvertently incarcerated individuals that were more likely to have children (Lynch & Sabol, 1997). The mandatory minimums set into motion a cascade of changes for those individuals that had children. Children whose parents were entangled with the criminal justice system were more likely to suffer poor mental health outcomes, to have multiple housing placements and multiple changes in schools, to struggle academically, and to have trouble with different relationships and subsequent caregivers, to name a few problems (Arditti, 2012; Dallaire, 2007; Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2009; Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Johnston, 1995; Kinner, Alati,

Najman, & Williams, 2007; Mackintosh, Myers, & Kennon, 2006; Murray & Farrington, 2008; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

The in-depth look at the experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence provided general knowledge about this kind of experience and what issues adolescents faces in this situation. By highlighting these experiences, social workers and advocacy groups can advocate for polices and funding that will help this population. This study created new knowledge that filled a gap in the literature about the adolescent experience of parental incarceration. Therefore social workers, social service agencies, and policymakers will start to have specific enough research to create policies and protocols that take into account the adolescent experience of this phenomenon.

Statement of the Problem Studied and Specific Objectives Achieved

The most recent estimates taken by the United States Justice Department in 2007 state that there are over 1.7 million children who have a parent that is incarcerated (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Of these 1.7 million children, 47.4% of children between 10 and 17 years old had a parent incarcerated in state prisons and 50.4% of children between 10 and 17 years old had a parent incarcerated in federal prisons (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). African-American children were seven times more likely than White children to have a parent incarcerated and Hispanic children were more than twice as likely to have a parent incarcerated than White children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). The criminal justice system currently does not have a standardized method for gathering data on inmate dependents, also known as children. Therefore, this number is a conservative estimate of the number of children affected by this phenomenon (Johnston, 1995). Regardless of the

estimate, adolescence for any child can be tough and is often fraught with hardships and disagreements with caregivers. Having a parent incarcerated during this phase makes life more challenging for parents, caregivers, and the adolescent. Understanding the impact of parental incarceration at this stage of development is crucial because there are so many changes occurring naturally. During adolescence there are cognitive, emotional, physical, and social changes that occur (Johnston, 1995; Kaplan, 1991; Lidz, 1983; Newman & Newman, 2009; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). This study was unique since most of the current literature looks at young children or preadolescents. The few studies that have included adolescents looked at the clinical population in a way that was solely interested in their mental health issues. This study was therefore also unique because it aimed to understand the adolescent's experience of the phenomenon from all perspectives, not just from a mental health perspective.

The literature defines "adolescence" to be between the ages of 12 and 19 years old (Newman & Newman, 2009). Psychoanalytic and developmental thinkers further define adolescence into three distinct phases: early adolescence, with ages between 12 and 15 years old; middle adolescence or adolescence proper, between 15 and 18 years old; and late adolescence, between 18 and 22 years old (Blos, 1962; Kaplan, 1991; Lidz, 1983). Adolescence is a phase of life in which many changes occur: physical and sexual maturation, increase in cognitive thought processes, formation of a cohesive identity (both personal and sexual), increase in experience and control of emotions, increase in reliance on peers, and engagement in adult work and intimate relationships (Blos, 1962; Johnston, 1995; Kaplan, 1991; Lidz, 1983; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). A parent's absence affects normal cognitive and developmental tasks that occur during adolescence.

The problem studied was: What is the lived experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence? The overall objective was to gain a deeper understanding of the subjective and lived experience of parental incarceration during one's adolescence. In order to discern the answers to the larger question, the data was explored to discover what the adolescent's lived experience of the parent was prior to, during, and after the incarceration; what was going on at that time in the adolescent's life that influenced the experience; how the incarceration of a parent influenced the adolescent's development; and what the adolescent's experience of others was during the parent's incarceration.

Foregrounding

This researcher has not had any personal experience with the phenomenon studied. This researcher has personal friends and patients who have dealt with this phenomenon. These friends and patients shared their understandings of their lives, which got this researcher interested in the phenomenon. This researcher acknowledges that she has had experience with loss but not loss through parental incarceration. This researcher acknowledges that her experience with loss would have been different from the experiences that the research participants faced. However, this researcher found that her experience of loss was an asset in creating a researcher-participant relationship.

This researcher acknowledges that the phenomenon of parental incarceration was more prevalent in minority groups, which was to say that the population studied was ethnically and culturally different from the researcher. Therefore, this researcher expected that her racial makeup would influence the research participants' willingness to discuss

the phenomenon. The researcher assumed that if racial differences existed between researcher and participant, this difference had the potential to create a barrier. If there were to be a barrier, it would have been assessed and discussed in order to minimize the barrier and develop trust allowing for more open responses. However, the researcher's ethnicity turned out not to be a barrier to the study.

This researcher heard a wide range of experiences and stories from participants in relation to the studied phenomenon. The researcher found that the participants in the study varied widely in how they processed and understood their experience of the phenomenon. Some participants were discussing the phenomenon for the first time in their lives. On the other hand, there were participants in the study who had had the opportunity to discuss this phenomenon with friends, family members, social workers, or therapists. Therefore, this researcher found that not all participants' stories, experiences, comfort levels, or understandings were the same. This researcher believed and found that the participant's experience of the phenomenon was intertwined with other aspects of the participant's life in some way such as family ties, relationships, education, friendships, employment, and intrapsychic growth. The researcher also expected and found that the studied phenomenon affected the participant in their past as well as having ramifications on their current situation and their future.

The United States has a problem of its own making on its hands. In an effort to fight the war on drugs and crime, many individuals who have been incarcerated for low-level crimes were parents. Numerous children and adolescents have suffered as a consequence of their parent's involvement in the criminal justice system. Unfortunately, this problem has become too big to ignore. Social workers and social service agencies

that interact with this population and the children of incarcerated parents face difficult battles in advocating to have a relationship with the incarcerated parent, especially adolescents. The study's goals of understanding, advocating, and broadening the research in this area to help serve this population better were achieved.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The intersection between parental incarceration and adolescent experience is large and unknown. Although there are unknowns, the adolescent's experience is influenced by a number of different aspects of development. To better understand the experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence, the developmental tasks of adolescence are explored so that the reader gets a sense of which tasks are affected by having an incarcerated parent. Alongside development, adolescence ushers in changes in attachment, separation, and the parent-child relationship, all of which are explored so as to understand the impact that parental incarceration has on these changes. The impacts of parental incarceration are an area of research that has been neglected by academia. Although there is still more research to be done, the few studies pertaining to the potential effects of parental incarceration on adolescence were considered. Studies on subsequent caregivers of adolescents affected by parental incarceration shed light on what life is like after the parent is sent to prison. Another area reviewed was studies on the knowledge of the parental incarceration and the meaning it holds for the adolescent. Studies on maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent and the difficulties faced by adolescents and their subsequent caregivers were explored. A few studies that focused on issues specific to adolescents of incarcerated parents are explored to shed light on the

difficulties that this population faces. It was not until recently that the phenomenon of incarceration was considered to be a loss. As a result, exploring the crossroads between loss and parental incarceration was pertinent to the study.

Adolescence. Early adolescence is a time of many physical changes. The adolescent is thrown into making sense of the physical changes and new sexual feelings in his or her body (Kaplan, 1991). An early adolescent must master the following tasks: redefining one's self and one's relationship with one's parents in relation to the pubertal growth spurt, moving from same-sex peer groups to mixed-sex peer groups, increasing one's capacities for formal operational thought and abstract concepts, navigating the beginnings of sexual arousal and interest in new love objects, and renegotiating oedipal attachments (Blos, 1979a; Kaplan, 1991; Lidz, 1983).

Middle adolescence is defined by a slightly different set of tasks. Many intrapsychic changes occur in this phase. Development in this stage of adolescence is focused on the creation of a sense of self and identity, self-regulation of emotions and self-esteem, movement from peer relations into more intimate partner relationships, greater independence from parents and increased reliance on one's internalized moral standards, denial of attractiveness and dependence on parents, and management of strong desires to keep parents as internalized objects (Kaplan, 1991; Lidz, 1983).

Late adolescence is a time of consolidation. Following all of the previous physical and intrapsychic changes, late adolescence is when these changes coalesce and the individual makes sense of who he or she is and how he or she feels and chooses a trajectory towards further growth. At this stage, the adolescent is defining his or her identity and morals, which influences the other tasks during this phase. Relationships

take on a new meaning and focus more on finding a partner for marriage (Kaplan, 1991; Lidz, 1983). Education at this stage is focused on helping the adolescent choose a career path (Kaplan, 1991; Lidz, 1983).

Attachment in adolescence. Another task at this stage of development for the adolescent is the transferring of attachment from the parent to one's peers (McElhaney, Allen, Stephenson, & Hare, 2009). Before expanding on the task of attachment in adolescence, it is useful to understand how separation and working models of attachment are formed. Infants form one of three attachment styles – secure, avoidant, or resistant – in relation to how the infant's needs are met and how reliable and available his or her environment or caregiver may be (Benoit & Parker, 1994). These attachment styles evolve as the individual ages, creating what is called “states of mind” and working models of attachment to one's self and other figures (Benoit & Parker, 1994; Bowlby, 1973c). These working models are formed on the basis of how acceptable or unacceptable the person views him- or herself to be in the eyes of the attachment figure, how accessible and responsive the attachment figure is to him or her, and whether or not he or she feels confident that the attachment figure is readily available (Bowlby, 1973c).

Children, adolescents, and adults who have attached to other people move through three phases when there is a temporary or permanent separation. Adults, theoretically, are not as affected by separations as are adolescents or young children because as individuals age one can withstand longer separations (Bowlby, 1973b). The first phase during a separation is protest. In this phase, there is an anxiety about the potential danger of losing the object (Bowlby, 1973b). Despair is the next phase. In this phase, there is the pain of mourning because there has been an actual loss of an object (Bowlby, 1973b). Lastly,

detachment and defense constitute the final phase. In this phase, an individual employs defenses to help him or her to deal with the anxiety and pain caused by the loss (Bowlby, 1973b). Along with these three phases in response to separation, adults and children both respond with the emotions of anger, ambivalence, and anxiety. The individual uses anger and anxiety to warn the attachment figure not to leave (Bowlby, 1973a). Ambivalence in this case comes from the child not knowing whether the attachment figure will disappear again (Bowlby, 1973a). Like other emotions, the anger one feels towards an attached loved one can be redirected, projected, repressed, or displaced onto others or the self which makes attachment complicated (Bowlby, 1973a).

Although the models of attachment are created and cemented during childhood, they may or may not remain unchanged into adulthood (Bowlby, 1973a). As children enter into adolescence and adulthood, their attachment styles change slightly. If an individual was a secure infant, he or she becomes an autonomous adult; an avoidant infant has a dismissing attitude to attachment as an adult; and a resistant infant has a preoccupied attachment style as an adult (Benoit & Parker, 1994). Originally, there were three identified attachment styles: secure, insecure-avoidant (anxious), and insecure-ambivalent (preoccupied) (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Although these labels accounted for most infants, there was a group of infants that were unclassifiable until Main and Solomon identified the fourth and final attachment style, disorganized attachment (Main & Solomon, 1986; Main & Solomon, 1990). This type of attachment if not worked through during childhood and adolescence can create an attachment rooted in unresolved trauma or loss in adulthood (Main & Hesse, 1990). The task for adolescents as they transcend life stages is to transfer their attachment from their parents to their

peers and love interests (Ainsworth, 1989). Ainsworth (1989) reports that affectual bonds are different from other relationships and bond because they are long-term enduring connections that are unique and non-interchangeable. With this kind of bond, there is a desire to maintain closeness to this individual. An attachment is considered an affectual bond; therefore, an individual's first attachment figure is never fully replaceable although an individual can create strong affectual bonds with others (Ainsworth, 1989). There are four characteristics that distinguish an attachment relationship from other types of relationships: proximity seeking, use of secure base behavior, use of safe haven behavior, and involuntary protest when there is separation (Ainsworth, 1989; Allen & Land, 1999).

Parent-child relationship. In adolescence the shift of affectual bonds from parents to peers is a developmental move towards a "goal-corrected/directed" partnership with one's parents (Allen & Land, 1999). Establishing autonomy and relatedness in relation to one's parents is a part of this change in partnership not only for the adolescent, but also for the parent (Allen & Hauser, 1996). This developmental process is influenced by the parent's ability to relax their power and their restrictiveness on the adolescent's ability to make his or her own decisions (Fuligni & Eccles, 1993). For parents, middle adolescence is the most difficult stage, because not only is their child making changes, but the parents also have to change as well (Lidz, 1983). How well parents handle this reorganization affects how the adolescent manages this process. There is a natural mourning process that occurs in this developmental phase for both the parent and adolescent as the adolescent relinquishes his or her strong tie with his or her parents (Blos, 1962). This relinquishment of one's parents and their functions happens gradually over the course of adolescence. The adolescent uses repetition of different experiences to gain mastery over the loss of

the parent and gain control over different psychic functions (Blos, 1962). Through this process there is decreased reliance on parents as attachment figures; however, this process does not mean that parents become obsolete. It means that the adolescent becomes less dependent on the parent for knowledge about the world and regulation of behaviors and emotions, yet the child-parent relationship is still considered important in a new way (Allen & Land, 1999; Blos, 1979b; Kaplan, 1991; Lidz, 1983).

As the adolescent becomes less reliant on his or her parents as a moral compass, one's peer group takes on an important role in this arena. The adolescent turns to his or her peer group for discussion of models of behavior, guidance, and acceptance of standards of behavior (Lidz, 1983). As the adolescent turns to his or her peers for guidance and turns away from his or her parents, the adolescent also looks to other adults for one of two reasons: either because he or she feels closest to people with whom he or she identifies, or to fill the emptiness that was created through developmental change (Blos, 1979a; Blos, 1979b; Kaplan, 1991; Lidz, 1983). In this part of development, the changes to the adolescent's psychic equilibrium lead the adolescent to look unstable as he or she processes the changes and the meaning that these changes bring (Blos, 1979b). Blos (1979b) indicates that during this time of restructuring, the adolescent regresses in the service of new ego functions that were once functions that his or her parents served. It is this regressive pull towards the parents that renews longings, desires, and fears related to the child's relationship with his or her parents, which can be difficult for the adolescent. Due to this process, the adolescent begins to devalue his or her parents in service of the ego to show him- or herself that one does not need one's parents for judgments, morality, or functions such as emotional regulation (Lidz, 1983). At this time,

the adolescent is coming to the realization that his or her parents are real people and are not the parents from his or her fantasy; this recognition of reality influences the person the adolescent would like to become (Lidz, 1983). Blos (1979b) and Lidz (1983) indicate that adolescent defenses become more structured to help the individual manage his or her own emotions, impulses, and experiences of the world. At this developmental stage, attachment to a parent is already transforming without the added complexity of having a parent incarcerated.

Studies of potential effects of parental incarceration on adolescents. The parent-child relationship is affected in many ways when a parent is incarcerated. Research shows that the impact on the parent-child relationship while a parent is incarcerated is dependent on what the relationship was like prior to the incarceration (Arditti, 2012). Therefore, the gender of the parent, whether the parent lived with the adolescent prior to the incarceration, what type of crime the parent was convicted of, and how involved the parent was as a parent prior to his or her incarceration all influence the parent-child relationship during and after the incarceration (Arditti, 2012). The role of a parent is to give guidance, support, nurturance, and protection. When a parent is incarcerated, the adolescent and parent may reverse roles. The adolescent is now in the role of providing support, guidance, nurturance, and protection to his or her parent while the parent is incarcerated (Boudin & Zeller-Berkman, 2010). Incarceration also robs both the parent and adolescent of the everyday aspects of parenting, such as getting advice, a mother helping to do the adolescent's hair, the adolescent testing the parent's limits, and parent-child bonding from one-on-one time that occurs naturally.

For adolescents, a parent's incarceration means that a gradual decrease in reliance on the parent is not possible. The incarcerated parent is out of the adolescent's everyday life and cannot provide the support or presence that the adolescent wants and needs. Maintaining a relationship with the incarcerated parent will be explored in depth later, but the willingness of all parties involved to do so influences the parent-child relationship.

When these adolescents cannot count on support from their incarcerated parents, they look to subsequent caregivers or peers for support. For most adolescents, telling their peers that they have an incarcerated parent invites stigma and shame to follow them (Boudin & Zeller-Berkman, 2010). Not having a peer group that is understanding, accepting, and supporting of the adolescent increases feelings of isolation, stigma, and shame about themselves and about the incarcerated parent (Boudin & Zeller-Berkman, 2010). As a result, adolescents who do not live in an area in which having an incarcerated parent is common will likely not talk about his or her incarcerated parent with his or her peers.

Parental incarceration can have many effects on the adolescent regardless of attachment. The adolescent can potentially suffer from trauma-reactive behaviors; premature independence from the parent-child relationship; identification with the incarcerated parent, which could lead to intergenerational crime and incarceration; dysfunctional relationships with subsequent caregivers and peers; and decreases in school performance and behavior (Johnston, 1995; Schlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). As the adolescent's cognitive thought process increases the disruption caused by parental incarceration can manifest as maladaptive behaviors and derail development (Reid & Eddy, 2002).

When an adolescent's parent is incarcerated, there are many considerations that factor into how the adolescent handles his or her parent's incarceration. The following are some of the considerations that have been discussed in the literature: the environment into which and the subsequent caregiver with whom the adolescent is placed during the parent's incarceration; how much the adolescent knows about his or her parent's incarceration; the level and kind of contact that the adolescent has with the incarcerated parent; and any functioning or mental health issues facing the adolescent.

Studies on subsequent caregivers. One aspect to take into consideration is the environment into which and the subsequent caregiver with whom the adolescent is placed when his or her parent is incarcerated. The parent with whom the adolescent lived prior to the parent's incarceration has a big influence on who will be the subsequent caregiver. Mothers are more likely to be the primary caregiver than fathers before a parent is arrested (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Mumola, 2000). For fathers that are incarcerated, their children tend to reside in the child's mother's care, and when the mother is incarcerated, most often her children reside in the home of one of the child's grandparents (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Travis & Waul, 2003). About 43.8% of parents that had a minor child living in the household with them prior to the parent's incarceration were single parents (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Children and adolescents living in single-parent homes are more likely to be relocated to living with another family member. This relocation includes the loss of his or her parent's financial support, which makes the adolescent more likely to feel the effects of poverty (Hairston, 2007; Travis & Waul, 2003). This effect of poverty can also be the case when an adolescent is placed with his or her grandparent. One study suggested that the new living situation and

caretaking experience can be satisfactory and provide the child with support, love and care; however, it can be hard on the grandparent and his or her meager resources (Hanlon, Carswell, & Rose, 2007). As government policy stands in the 2000s, an incarcerated parent who received welfare benefits for his or her child prior to being incarcerated no longer receives this money, nor does the money automatically follow the child and go to his or her subsequent caregiver (Hairston, 2003). This financial issue is a problem for subsequent caregivers because it makes supporting children and adolescents of who have incarcerated parents much more difficult. The little money that was saved up by the grandparent may not cover the increased expenses of having another child in the home (Hairston, 2003). It has been found that grandparents struggle to provide adequate care for their grandchildren, as well as taking on the burden of being the gatekeeper to the adolescent's parent (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2011). The literature describes gatekeeping as the subsequent caregiver's decision to allow or not allow the adolescent the ability to communicate with his or her parent, based on how disruptive the communication is on the adolescent's behavior (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2011).

Studies on the knowledge of parental incarceration. Depending on situational factors, it is hard to tell how much a child or adolescent knows about his or her incarcerated parent and what will happen to the child or adolescent in the future. There are many phases of the incarceration process during which an adolescent can become aware of his or her parent's incarceration and its consequences: arrest, sentencing, placement, and incarceration. The research shows that caregivers may not share details of the incarcerated parent's sentence and/or details of the crimes committed by the parent

with the adolescent (Hairston, 2007; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Subsequent caregivers often try to shelter the child or adolescent from the stigma of having a parent incarcerated. For some families, it is easier to tell the child or adolescent that his or her parent is off at college, in the armed forces, or somewhere else, so that when they are faced with situations and questions about the parent, they can provide a non-stigmatizing answer (Hairston, 2003). If the subsequent caregiver and adolescent live in an area in which it is normative for a family member to be incarcerated, the family may be more likely to share the truth with the adolescent, which creates the potential for more social support (Hairston, 2003; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). On the other hand, some children and adolescents have seen their parent struggle with substance use, abuse, or criminal behaviors and are relieved when their parent is incarcerated because they know that their parent is safe and will receive the help he or she desperately needs (Siegel, 2011).

Studies on maintaining contact with an incarcerated parent. Another issue facing adolescents and their subsequent caregivers is the issue of maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent. The prison system has strict policies for family members of incarcerated individuals. Not all prisons allow visits. At many facilities that do allow visits, family members are subjected to specific visiting times and days, strip searches, and needing specific paperwork for the child or adolescent to see his or her parent (Hairston, 2003; Marton, 2005; Siegel, 2011). Most prisons are in rural locations, which makes it much harder for urban-centered families to visit their incarcerated loved ones due to scarce resources and the complex visiting policies of the facilities (Travis & Waul, 2003). When actual visits are not an option, prisons can send and receive mail on behalf of their inmates, which has been the most common way through which incarcerated

parents and their children can interact. Unfortunately, the mail from prisons is stamped with the name of the correctional facility, which announces that it is not regular mail (Hairston, 2003). Prisons do not allow incoming phone calls; however, they do allow outgoing collect phone calls that are charged per minute at extraordinarily high rates, some costing \$1 or more per minute (Hairston, 2003; Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper, & Shear, 2010; Siegel, 2011; Travis & Waul, 2003). These issues can create disagreements between caregivers, incarcerated parents, and adolescents if the caregiver feels that contact with the parent is either detrimental to the adolescent's functioning or too expensive to continue. In most situations the subsequent caregivers, mainly grandparents, become the gatekeepers of contact between the incarcerated parent and the adolescent. Some grandparents try to stay neutral and allow the relationship between incarcerated parent and adolescent to grow on its own, whereas others have strong opinions about parental contact. In some cases adolescents may try to contact their incarcerated parent without their subsequent caregiver's knowledge (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2011; Poehlmann et al., 2010).

Studies on issues adolescents who have incarcerated parents face. The desire to maintain contact with the incarcerated parent is just one of the many issues facing adolescents when their parent is incarcerated. Other issues adolescents may face include the following: school delinquency, premature sexual relationships, substance use, interpersonal problems, and criminal activities (Johnston, 1995; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). Several studies found that adolescents who had a parent incarcerated struggled with internalizing problems, such as depression; conduct problems; and a potential for criminal convictions as an adult (Huebner & Gustafson,

2007; Kinner, Alati, Najman, & Williams, 2007; Murray & Farrington, 2008; Murray & Murray, 2010; Murray, 2010). These issues are not fully understood and need more exploration as to why adolescents of incarcerated parents are at higher risk for these issues.

Loss and parental incarceration. Incarceration of a parent is a loss to the adolescent. Loss, regardless of whether it is temporary or permanent, impacts the individual. How an adolescent handles loss depends on many factors. Although most of the literature on loss pertains to death or divorce, the following factors relate to loss and trauma in general: the cause of the loss, which includes whether or not it was sudden, drawn out, or involved violence; the developmental phase of the individual, which includes his or her age and sex; the developmental progress the individual had made prior to the loss; the individual's temperament and capacities; and the type and kind of interaction that the individual receives from his or her environment and the availability of the subsequent caregiver (such as financial, interpersonal, etc.) (Altschul, 1988). It was not until recently that incarceration has begun to be considered a type of loss. A parent can be incarcerated temporarily; for weeks, months, or years; or up to permanently, for life. This uncertainty makes this type of loss hard to cope with and grieve. Unlike loss due to death, incarceration does not have set rituals or protocol that a family can follow when there is a loss. Therefore, incarceration can be classified as an ambiguous loss.² Boss (2007) indicates that to handle the lack of information, most families or individuals have no choice but to come up with a story of their own about the missing family

² Ambiguous loss occurs when there is lack of clarity as to whether or not a family member is part of the family system (Boss, 1991; Boss, 2007). This lack of clarity can result in confusion and conflict for family members, especially adolescents.

member. Depending on how the family handles the incarceration, an individual or family member can make a physically absent person psychologically present in the family (Boss, 1991; Boss, 2007). Even though a parent is incarcerated, he or she could potentially be present in the family system and in the adolescent's life.

As one can see, the literature on different aspects of the experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence is scattered and not interconnected. This study attempted to create connections between these separated aspects of the literature and fill the gap in the literature about the adolescent's experience of having a parent incarcerated. This study was pertinent because there was little to no literature on the adolescent's experience of this phenomenon. Due to this lack of literature, services provided to the adolescent population experiencing this phenomenon are inadequate or nonexistent. Therefore, this study increased the knowledge about this population and phenomenon as well as increasing the understanding of what this population faces on a day-to-day basis and what their needs are. As a result of an increase in the knowledge, social workers and social service providers can create better services for this vulnerable population during such a transitional period in development and life.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of the Study

As previously stated, attachment models are created during infancy and early childhood and influence other aspects of a child's development and adulthood. Bowlby, Ainsworth, and Main's attachment research led to the discoveries and literature on attachment behaviors that society has today. To begin, Bowlby felt that attachment behaviors were the human equivalent of a behavioral system to ensure that the infant

would survive (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969). The attachment behavioral system is influenced by the attachment, fear, and exploratory systems. These systems are interrelated and influence activation of each system depending on the environment (Koback, 1999). Attachment theory began as a way to describe and research the interactions and relationship between a mother and her infant in a variety of situations (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969).

Formation of attachment. It is important to discuss how attachments are formed between a mother and infant throughout development before understanding the impact of separations on the dyad. Although there are many different types of principal caregivers, “mother” is used here for convenience. The development of attachment occurs in four phases: orientation and signals without discrimination of figure; orientation and signals directed toward one or more discriminated figures; maintenance of proximity to a discriminated figure by locomotion and signals; and implications of the partnership for the organization of attachment behavior during the preschool years. The first three phases of attachment development occur within the first year of life for the infant. The first phase, called orientation and signals without discrimination of figure, lasts from birth to up to 12 weeks (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Marvin & Britner, 1999). The infant uses signals such as crying, babbling, etc. to engage the mother, without much discrimination between caregivers, to alleviate his or her distress (as in hunger, needing a new diaper, etc.). Internal working models of the infant are primitively developed and are thus only capable of turning on and off signals to engage the mother (Marvin & Britner, 1999).

As the infant continues to develop, he or she moves into the second phase of attachment, referred to as “orientation and signals directed toward one or more discriminated figures.” This phase lasts from 12 weeks of age up to six months of age (Bowlby, 1969). Similarly to phase one, the infant uses signals to engage his or her caregivers, but the infant can now discriminate between different familiar caregivers, as well as discriminate between unfamiliar and familiar caregivers in his or her environment (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Marvin & Britner, 1999). In addition to being able to discriminate between caregivers, the infant actively makes attempts to engage socially with his or her caregiver (Marvin & Britner, 1999). Even though the infant can now discriminate between caregivers, this ability does not mean that the infant can conceptualize internal working models in which these caregivers are separate and different from him- or herself. Therefore, internal working models are starting to become more distinct but are not fully operational (Marvin & Britner, 1999).

The third phase that the infant moves into is the maintenance of proximity to a discriminated figure by locomotion and signals. This phase begins around six months of age and extends into the third year of life (Bowlby, 1969). It is during this phase that the infant/toddler’s attachment becomes more solidified and discriminatory between attachment figures, adjunct attachment figures, and strangers through the use of locomotion and signals (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Marvin & Britner, 1999). In this phase, goal-directed and proximity-seeking behaviors start to emerge and form (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Marvin & Britner, 1999). The toddler’s organizational changes, which include the internal working models, new communication skills, and the integration of systems (exploratory, wary, and sociable), are due to development (Marvin & Britner, 1999).

Infants at this stage are considered fully engaged in an attachment system with his or her caregiver when using these new changes (Marvin & Britner, 1999). Internal working models at this stage are more stable and solidified such that the toddler has obtained object permanence, which helps him or her set goals in interactions with others (Marvin & Britner, 1999). As a result, the toddler can decide, depending on the environment and his or her perception of it, how to proceed in interacting with it.

During this phase, the child's development is rapidly expanding. The toddler can not only move around more freely on his or her own, but can also interact verbally with his or her caregivers (Marvin & Britner, 1999). As the toddler's ability to verbalize his or her experience continues to grow, the toddler's internal working models of others and self are continually changing as well (Marvin & Britner, 1999). Along with development, Marvin and Britner (1999) highlight the development of the exploratory, sociable, and wary systems that emerge and are integrated during this phase. With locomotion, the toddler can now explore his or her world more freely without the help of the caregiver. With exploration comes interaction with new people. The toddler who is attached to his or her primary caregivers is both interested in and wary of strangers at the same time. The wary system for a toddler emerges during this phase when the child becomes aware of novel and sudden changes that trigger the survival mode in the child; that is, wanting to be closer to the primary caregiver for safety.

The fourth phase is known as "implications of partnership for the organization of attachment behavior during the preschool years." Bowlby (1969) is not sure when this phase starts but speculates that it is closer to the third year of life for a child. In this phase, the child becomes less egocentric, learns that his or her caregiver is separate from

him or her, and that each person has a set of goals and motives behind his or her actions (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Marvin & Britner, 1999). During this phase, the child's internal working models have evolved to include an increased number of and different kinds of situations and events. This increase in internal working models allows the child to have more control over behaviors and thoughts that help allow the child to integrate his or her goals with his or her attachment figure's goals (Marvin & Britner, 1999). Attachment behavior in this phase changes from proximity seeking to more of an emergent partnership between the child and caregiver, although attachment will always have a proximity-seeking aspect to it (Marvin & Britner, 1999). By the end of this phase, if development is unhindered, the child will be able to be more independent from the attachment figure and more able to maintain a goal-corrected partnership with the attachment figure (Marvin & Britner, 1999).

Attachment and separation. Bowlby's understanding of attachment is founded on two main principles that differed from those who came before him: attachment comes from actual availability and responsiveness of the child's caregiver to the child, and the child's perception of the parent's availability is influenced by physical presence, expectations of the parent, and communication (Bowlby, 1973; Koback, 1999). This availability and responsiveness of the attachment figure impacts the separation process, as well as the type of attachment the child has with his or her caregiver. As previously stated, a child goes through three phases when there is a separation from his or her primary attachment figure. The first phase in a separation is the protest stage. In this stage, the child engages in attachment behaviors such as screaming, crying, following the caregiver, and pounding the door in an attempt to keep the caregiver from leaving

(Bowlby, 1973; Koback, 1999). A child in this phase feels fear, anger, and distress at the separation from the attachment and security figure and wonders how long the separation will last (Bowlby, 1973; Koback, 1999). The child in this phase has hope that the attachment figure will return and the child and attachment figure will be reunited once again (Bowlby, 1973; Koback, 1999).

If the separation continues, the child will move into the next phase, which is despair. In this phase, the child's hope that the attachment figure will return diminishes and hopelessness takes its place (Bowlby, 1973; Koback, 1999). Feelings of despair accompany this phase because the child realizes that his or her efforts and behaviors did not engage the figure to stay (Bowlby, 1973; Koback, 1999). The child realizes that there is a decreased chance that the attachment figure will return and begins to withdraw from the attachment figure and others in his or her environment due to the loss (Bowlby, 1973; Koback, 1999). For some children, hostile behaviors towards other children or a toy can be seen as an attempt to release frustration at the attachment figure (Bowlby, 1973; Koback, 1999).

The last phase in separation is detachment, in which the child uses defenses to manage the loss. Detachment is used to handle the emotional distress the child feels at the loss of the attachment figure (Bowlby, 1973; Koback, 1999). In this phase, the child will actively turn towards his or her environment in an attempt to find a new attachment figure with which to connect (Bowlby, 1973; Koback, 1999). If the original attachment figure returns to the child during this phase, the child may treat the figure with detachment, neutrality, clingy behaviors, or apathy in an attempt to communicate the

child's unhappiness at the separation and to discourage future separations (Bowlby, 1973; Koback, 1999).

Attachment styles. Ainsworth built on Bowlby's attachment literature by focusing on maternal sensitivity to the child. This focus led to the attachment classifications of secure, insecure-ambivalent, and insecure-avoidant. It was not until Main's contribution later that the fourth attachment style of disorganized attachment was added. Through many Strange Situation studies, Ainsworth and her team (1978) began to crystallize a classification system for attachment between mothers and their infants. The Strange Situation studies led to four distinct groups of attachment behaviors: secure, insecure-ambivalent, insecure-avoidant, and an unclassifiable group (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Ainsworth and her team (1978) state that the secure group of infants interacted with their mothers in a more compatible and harmonious way than did the other groups of infants. This observation was a result of watching the dyads interact in positive ways where the mother could read the infant's signals correctly and the infant could be calmed and reaffirmed by the mother when there had been separations (Ainsworth et al., 1978). These infants could use the mother as a secure base from which to explore the room and others in it without overwhelming anxiety and could use the mother upon her return to calm him- or herself down (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Ainsworth and her team (1978) state that this group of infants was different from the other two groups in the following ways: these infants were more willing to comply and cooperate with the mother's demands, were more outgoing and would cooperate with an unfamiliar adult figure, and were more competent in his or her environment; therefore, they were less easily frustrated, more persistent, and had a more positive overall mood.

Ainsworth's team found that the next group of infants showed behaviors that classified them as insecure-ambivalent. This group of infants had mothers who were less responsive to the infant's signals and communications (Ainsworth et al., 1978). However, the mothers in this group were each engaged enough that she did not reject her infant's signals as the mothers in the insecure-avoidant group did (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Results from the Strange Situations highlight the fact that these infants do not have confidence in their mother's ability to be available and responsive to their needs (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Due to this lack of availability and responsiveness, the infant cannot use the mother as a secure base from which to explore his or her environment. This group of infants is chronically anxious in relation to the mother's ability to be responsive and available, and as a consequence, they suffer from higher amounts of separation anxiety and distress and it does not take much to activate their attachment behaviors (Ainsworth et al., 1978). The ambivalence towards the mother for this group of infants highlights the conflict between the desire to be close to the mother and the mother's inability to be available and correctly time her responsiveness to the infant (Ainsworth et al., 1978). As a result, these infants protest the mother's separations much more, are harder to be soothed when the mother returns, and are angry with the mother for longer periods of time for having left him or her (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

The third group of infants classified were insecure-avoidant. This classification was descriptive of both the mother's and the infant's behaviors. One important aspect of the mother's behavior in this classification was that the mother rejected the infant's signals and desire to have bodily contact (Ainsworth et al., 1978). This group of mothers also was more readily angry and irritated by their infants, in addition to being irritated by the

demands placed on them by their infants, and these mothers were more rigid and compulsive in their care of the infant (Ainsworth et al., 1978). It is as though the infant and the infant's needs inconvenienced the mother. Ainsworth and her team (1978) state that this group of mothers tended, due to their own experience of the infant, to give the infant unpleasant and unresponsive experiences of close bodily contact. In the Strange Situation, the insecure-avoidant infant's behavior was the most striking. Although the infant was giving signals indicating a desire to be soothed, he or she would actively ignore the mother's attempts to calm him or her down and would actively try to push the mother away (Ainsworth et al., 1978). These infants engaged in approach-avoidance behaviors, which highlights the conflict this group faces: they want to be soothed but do not have confidence in their mother's ability to be available and responsive to their needs (Ainsworth et al., 1978). However, the avoidance tactics used by the infant are used to suppress the anger felt towards the mother, who is experienced as real and dangerous (Ainsworth et al., 1978). The infant suppresses this anger in an attempt not to experience another rebuff from the mother (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

The fourth and final group was harder to classify due to the disorganized behavior of the infant. Main and Solomon (1990) classify this final group as disorganized/disoriented. This group of infants was found to have a disordering of expected temporal sequences, simultaneous display of contradictory behavior patterns, incomplete or undirected movements and expressions, direct indices of confusion and of apprehension, and behavioral stilling (Main & Solomon, 1986; Main & Solomon, 1990). These infants when separated and reunited with their mothers showed a mix of behaviors, as in welcoming contact in one moment and in the next moment sharply avoiding it or showing no

emotion to the mother (Main & Solomon, 1986; Main & Solomon, 1990). Infants in this classification also had contradictory behaviors with the mother when his or her affect did not connect or coincide with his or her behaviors. These contradictory behaviors lasted for long periods of time even after being picked up or settled by the mother (Main & Solomon, 1986; Main & Solomon, 1990). These infants in their movements and expressions with their mothers were stereotyped and incomplete at times (Main & Solomon, 1986; Main & Solomon, 1990). Compared to other groups, their movements looked as though they had intentional motivations behind them but ultimately did not follow through, therefore not communicating their message fully to the mother (Main & Solomon, 1986; Main & Solomon, 1990). Many of these infants when reunited with their mother after a separation showed confusion, apprehension, and fear (Main & Solomon, 1986; Main & Solomon, 1990). These infants exhibit behavioral stilling, which is an important characteristic for these infants: they look “dazed,” go limp, and stare off into space (Main & Solomon, 1986; Main & Solomon, 1990). These infants find their mother’s interaction with them disorienting, alarming, and frightening. Consequently, they cannot consistently rely on the mother’s ability to provide care in a responsive way or consistently be available when needed (Main & Solomon, 1986; Main & Solomon, 1990).

Attachment and adolescence. As the infant develops and continues to mature, these four categories of attachment get solidified and merged into an internal working model of attachment that the child then uses to understand and predict other people’s behavior over time. Although a child can have one type of attachment with one parent, this does not mean he or she has the same type of attachment with the other parent or caregiver.

Although infant-mother bonds set the stage for attachment, subsequent bonds, such as with the other parent, other caregivers, teachers, peers, friends, and romantic partners, influence affectional bonds and attachment (Ainsworth, 1989; Howes, 1999). Howes (1999) states that children who have multiple caregivers can have differing attachments to the caregivers based on the following three criteria: the caregiver's emotional investment in the child, the caregiver's provision of physical and emotional care of the child, and the caregiver's continuity and consistency in the child's life.

As stated before, adolescence is a time of tremendous change. As the child matures into an adolescent, attachment and attachment behaviors are readjusted. Although attachment does not change fully, there are gradual changes to attachment and attachment figures. In our individualistic society, it is believed that as one matures one becomes more independent and relies less on other people. However, this is not the case: as one matures, the person becomes less dependent on his or her caregiver for specific tasks, but this does not make the attachment figure or attachment obsolete (Allen & Land, 1999). As previously stated, during adolescence, the task in this time period is for the adolescent to become more independent and take on new responsibilities and capacities for him- or herself, as well as to create new attachments and relationships with others. Similarly to the infant exploring the environment under the watch of the mother, adolescents try out their own autonomy and abilities in the context of their relationships with their parents rather than in isolation, thus exploring new facets of their expanding world (Allen & Land, 1999). Therefore, the adolescent moves from a pattern of attachment that was asymmetrical to one that is more reciprocal where both individuals receive and offer love, support, and care (Allen & Land, 1999). Attachment in adolescence is born out of

attachment from an earlier time in the person's life. Thus infancy and the memories from early childhood in relation to one's caregivers influence adolescent attachment (Allen & Land, 1999). As a result, adolescent attachment, which has a basis in early life, is highly influenced by both the developmental changes occurring in the adolescent's life and the challenges that the current environment imposes on the adolescent (Allen & Land, 1999). At this time, the adolescent's views of one's self and differentiation between self and others increases and starts to become more internally based than externally based in relationships (Allen & Land, 1999; Bowlby, 1973).

The attachment framework allowed this study to focus on the relationship between the adolescent and the parent and how the phenomenon of parental incarceration impacts the adolescent. Exploration of the attachment relationship of the research participant when he or she was an adolescent gave the researcher insight into not only the participant's internal working models, but also the impact of external events on the relationship. As a result, this framework allowed the researcher to get to the core of the lived experience of the phenomenon.

Question Explored

The question explored was: What is the lived experience of having a parent (parental figure) incarcerated during one's adolescence?

Theoretical and Operational Definitions of Major Concepts

Adolescence. Adolescence is defined as the state of being an individual between the ages of 12 and 18 years old (Newman & Newman, 2009). Adolescence was further

defined as being between ages 15 and 18 years old because it was during this part of maturation that the majority of developmental changes occur in the parent-child relationship (Blos, 1962; Kaplan, 1991; Lidz, 1983). Thus this study used the more refined definition of adolescence, of being 15 to 18 years old.

Incarceration. Incarceration was considered to be serving a sentence of two years or longer in a state or federal prison (Crayton, Ressler, Mukamal, Jannetta, & Warwick, 2010). The general public uses the terms “jail” and “prison” interchangeably, but there are important differences in these terms. Jails are typically used to hold people for shorter periods of time, as well as holding people who have been arrested but have not yet been convicted of crimes. Federal or state prisons are places that typically house individuals who have committed and were convicted of crimes (Crayton et al., 2010). This study used these definitions for prison and jail.

Subsequent caregiver. Based on current definitions in the literature, subsequent caregiver or kinship care was considered to be the following: the other parent, grandparents, other relatives, friends, foster homes, and foster care agencies who are nurturing and protecting the child and who are there for him or her, full time (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Mumola, 2000; Smith, Krisman, Strozier, & Marley, 2004). This study used this definition to constitute a subsequent caregiver.

Incarcerated parent (parental figure). To ensure the researcher was looking at the same phenomenon, the incarcerated parent (parental figure) must have lived with or had significant daily contact with the adolescent prior to the incarceration. The literature indicates that around 46% of state and federal inmates who were parents lived with his or

her minor children at the time of admission to prison (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Mumola, 2000). This study used the above definition for an incarcerated parent.

Statement of Assumptions

It was assumed that a parent becoming incarcerated or involved in the criminal justice system sets into motion many changes that not only impact the parent, but also affect the adolescent as well. It was assumed that the parent's incarceration prompted changes in his or her child's life, including but not limited to changes in the child's financial situation, living arrangements, academic situation and performance, relationship with the incarcerated parent, relationship with the non-incarcerated parent or subsequent caregiver, and relationship to peers, family, and community. It was also assumed that the child's perception of the criminal justice system and thoughts and feelings towards the parent and his or her actions could change over time. Finally, it was assumed that the meaning of the experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence was elicited through the use of transcendental phenomenology methodology.

This chapter highlighted the current state of the literature on the impact of parental incarceration on the adolescent. Many studies have taken a look at the impact of this phenomenon on children; however, the adolescent experience was neglected. This study served to add to and broaden the knowledge on the impact of parental incarceration on the adolescent experience. This study created connections between the psychoanalytic literature, loss, attachment, and the real experience of each of the research participants to create a more cohesive and clear picture of the experience people face when a parent becomes incarcerated.

Chapter III

Methodology

Type of Study and Design

The focus of this qualitative phenomenological study was the lived experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence. The primary objective was to understand the experience and essence of what it was like for an individual to have a parent incarcerated. For this objective, Moustakas (1994) indicates that transcendental phenomenology is the preferred research method because the knowledge gained originates with the phenomenon itself. The research method attempted to exclude any part of the phenomenon that rests on prejudgment and biases. It attempted to understand the phenomenon from a new perspective and without prior knowledge or ideas as to what was thought to be happening. "For Hegel, phenomenology referred to knowledge as it appears in consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Therefore, to understand the essence of the phenomenon, the researcher had to start with the participant's own perceptions and reflections of his or her experience. Hence this study looked to describe both "what" the individual experienced and "how" the

individual experienced it. The philosophical foundation for this study was a transcendental-phenomenological one.

Transcendental phenomenology is a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness. Any phenomenon represents a suitable starting point for phenomenological reflection. The very appearance of something makes it a phenomenon. The challenge is to explicate the phenomenon in terms of its constituents and possible meanings, thus discerning the features of consciousness and arriving at an understanding of the essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 49).

The epistemological framework of this study was the constructivist perspective. The reality of this phenomenon was socially constructed from multiple angles that the participant-researcher team would construct together (Lincoln, 1990). Phenomenological descriptions focus on a person's created meaning to his or her lived experience of a phenomenon. These descriptions include all parts of the experience: consciousness, action, perception, intentional experience, and intersubjective validity (Moustakas, 1994). To understand the phenomenon, the inner perception of the individual helped prove the phenomenon's existence as well as its intentional existence in the real world (Moustakas, 1994). "Every mental act includes a presentation, a cognition, and a feeling, each of which is directed toward a phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 50). Thereby, an individual has thoughts, feelings, and even actions that were influenced by the phenomenon. As a result, transcendental phenomenology was used in the collection and interpretation of data. Moustakas (1994) identifies three core processes of transcendental

phenomenology to obtaining knowledge from one's experience: epoche, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. This transcendental-phenomenological study design included all of these components. The phenomenon explored was the experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence.

There were four steps in the analysis of the data. The first step in the analysis was the process of horizontalizing. In this process, each sentence that was important to the research topic was considered to have equal value to every other important sentence (Moustakas, 1994). The second step in the analysis was the creation of meaning. These "meaning units" were created from the horizontal statements (Moustakas, 1994). Following the creation of meaning units, the third step was the creation of themes. In this step, the meaning units were clustered into separate themes and any repetitive and overlapping statements were removed from the data (Moustakas, 1994). The last step consisted of the creation of the textual and structural descriptions of the experience. The textual description focused on "what" was experienced and the structural description focused on "how" the experience was experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Once the descriptions were formed, the two were integrated into a construction of the essences of the phenomenon studied (Moustakas, 1994).

Scope of Study, Setting, Population and Sampling, Sources and Nature of Data

Scope of study. This qualitative phenomenological study conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews that explored the lived experience of individuals who experienced having a parent incarcerated during their adolescence. This study described what was previously unarticulated: the meanings, the lived experiences of having a parent

incarcerated during one's adolescence, and the impacts this experience had on the individual. This study discovered the essences and structures of this kind of lived experience. The essences of the experience were explored through the use of language and writings.

Setting. The participants were interviewed in a location and at a time that was most convenient for them. The location ensured that the researcher and participant would have privacy, such as a room in a local community center or public library. These measures were used to ensure privacy, safety, and confidentiality. When the researcher had an interview, to ensure her safety, she informed a friend, loved one, or her dissertation chair of the interview. She then communicated that she had arrived to the location safely and returned to her home safely. The researcher carried a cell phone in case of emergencies.

Population and sampling plan. In phenomenological studies, the number of participants depends on the data. Therefore the number of participants and the number of in-depth interviews are determined by the quality of data that is discovered (Creswell, 2007; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Since the number of participants was dependent on the data, six participants were interviewed. The researcher only interviewed six participants because the nature of this kind of study allowed for the richness and depth of the data to develop enough that data saturation was hit at that point. Each participant was interviewed in depth up to three times, with four out of six participants participating in an additional fourth interview to share research findings.

Prior to the first research interview, the potential research participant was screened using a pre-interview phone call to determine eligibility. Once the participant was determined to be eligible for the study, the first interview covered the consent forms

and included initial non-intrusive questions that allowed participants to become comfortable with the research process and topic. The first interview and subsequent interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. In the second interview, the participant and researcher explored the experience of having an incarcerated parent in greater depth. The third interview followed up on any specific questions or themes that surfaced from other interviews and initial data analysis. The fourth and final interview was conducted after the participants were presented with the researcher's initial findings. This interview allowed the researcher to discern whether the findings resonated with the participants, as well as to provide for gathering additional information to add depth to the data. This optional fourth interview was digitally recorded and only the pertinent information was transcribed. This last interview lasted up to 30 minutes. For qualitative research designs, this final interview is defined as "member checking," a procedure examining the findings to determine whether they were consistent with the experience of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). All of the participants who participated in the fourth interview reported that the study's findings resonated with their experience.

This research study took a reflective look at the lived experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence; the participants were between the ages of 18 and 29 at the time of the study. The rationale for placing an age limitation on both the research participants and the experience was to help the researcher capture the true experiences more thoroughly. Purposive sampling from this age range provided a rich description of the lived experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence because the participants were developmentally at a place where they had greater cognitive ability to reflect on and describe the experience.

Participants volunteered to participate by responding to flyers (see Appendix A) placed in community centers, public libraries, and public spaces in Chicago neighborhoods that were known to have high crime and incarceration rates. These neighborhoods were found by using Chicago Police Department (CPD) crime maps. The CPD CLEARmap reporting and analysis application was used to identify the current areas of the city that had high crime rates. The following CLEARmap categories were used to identify communities and neighborhoods for the study: summarized by community areas, Index Crimes³ (serious crimes) and Non-Index Crimes⁴ (less serious crimes) with the time frame of the past year (Chicago Police Department, 2014). To ensure the researcher's safety while hanging recruitment flyers, the researcher traveled with another individual in daylight to the areas that were considered to have high crime rates. Both researcher and her helper carried cell phones in case of any emergencies. The researcher and her assistant contacted friends or loved ones to communicate that they had safely returned after posting recruitment flyers. The following parameters stipulated that the six research participants (see Appendix B):

1. Were between the ages of 18 and 29,
2. Have or had a parent incarcerated during his or her adolescence (15 to 17 years old),
3. Had a parent who was incarcerated for at least two years,

³ CPD (2014) defines the following crimes as Index Crimes: homicide (first and second degrees), criminal sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, aggravated battery, burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, and arson.

⁴ CPD (2014) defines the following crimes as Non-Index Crimes: involuntary manslaughter, simple assault, simple battery, forgery and counterfeiting, fraud, embezzlement, stolen property, vandalism, weapons violation, prostitution, criminal sexual abuse, drug abuse, gambling, offenses against family, liquor license, disorderly conduct, and miscellaneous non-index offenses (violations of laws or ordinances).

4. Lived with the incarcerated parent for at least a month prior to the parent's incarceration,
5. Were willing to be interviewed up to four times and be digitally recorded each time.

Sources and nature of data. Individuals who experienced the phenomenon of having a parent incarcerated during his or her adolescence were interviewed. This research study used multiple participant interviews, researcher field notes, and memos to gather data on the experience. The nature of the data was personal participant reflections of his or her past and current experience of this phenomenon.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Multiple phenomenological interviews were used to collect data. There were three interviews that lasted from 45 minutes to one hour each. A follow-up interview was planned after the data analysis was completed to share results with the research participants. There were three sources of data: participant interviews, researcher field notes, and memos. Primary data came from six participants' semi-structured interviews about the experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence (see Appendix C). The questions in Appendix C are the initial questions, and any additional questions for the research participant were formulated through the interview process. Interview questions in qualitative research are open-ended and evolving; thus, more research questions will surface as the research study continues (Creswell, 2007). Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) state that flexible interview questions and a nonjudgmental interview manner allows for the research participant to feel comfortable, establish a sense

of safety and rapport with the researcher, and give thorough answers to the research questions. This manner of conducting the interview allowed the interview to flow naturally. The fourth interview was optional, in which the participant was invited to share their reactions to the research findings. This interaction provided an opportunity for feedback. The last interview consisted of the participant and researcher discussing any final impressions of the research findings based on a copy of a synthesis of findings that was sent to the participant (Moustakas, 1994). This feedback allowed the researcher to get participant validation in relation to the essence and experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). All interviews were conducted by the researcher and lasted up to 60 minutes, with the exception of the optional final interview lasting up to 30 minutes. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed. Each transcription was broken down into discrete statements through the procedure laid out in the plan for data analysis section.

Prior to the beginning of the first interview, the participant was given the consent form and was given time to read through it. The researcher reviewed the form with each participant, asked him or her to state his or her understanding of the study, and confirmed that each participant had a clear understanding of what his or her consent to participation entailed (see Appendix D). Once the consent forms and questions were answered, the researcher collected the data by digitally recording the semi-structured interviews. This type of interview style allowed the participant to describe his or her experiences without much direction from the researcher. The multiple interviews allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions based on themes that emerged from previous interviews. Throughout the interview and data analysis process, the researcher set up meetings with her

dissertation chair during which they discussed any issues with the interview or analysis processes.

The researcher took field notes on important moments in the interview, participant behaviors, and key phrases to summarize the experience. The researcher created research memos about ideas and themes that came up during participant interviews. Alongside the field notes and memos, the researcher transcribed all digitally recorded interviews, de-identified all data, and then coded the data. All research materials were kept in a locked filing cabinet and on a password-protected computer. Only the researcher had access to the research material. Each participant was assigned a code number at the beginning of his or her first interview. This code number was written on a sheet of paper that was stored separately from the research data in a locked filing cabinet.

Data Collection

Initially recruitment went very slowly. The researcher had posted flyers in many neighborhoods and did not get much of a response. The researcher revamped the study's flyer to make it less verbose and more eye-catching, and to advertise that participants would receive a gift card after participating. This change in the flyer increased response rates in the same neighborhoods where the first flyers were placed. Recruitment flyers were placed at the beginning of the year. Interested participants were called back right away to determine if the participant was eligible for the study. The researcher told participants who qualified for the study around what time they would hear from the researcher to schedule an interview. It took the researcher some time to get through the interviews. Therefore, it took the researcher almost four months to return calls to some of

the participants. Due to this lag time, some of the phone numbers for interested participants were either no longer working numbers or, upon calling, the researcher got an error message that informed her that the interested participant had not paid their phone bill. The researcher also noticed that scheduling interviews with participants during the cold months was easier than it was during the months when the weather got warmer. The researcher also had to adjust to the availability of rooms in the local libraries where most of the interviews took place. The libraries were closed on holidays when the researcher and participant would have met due to the participant having the holiday off of work as well. During the time of data collection, the City of Chicago had its mayoral race, so the researcher and participants had a harder time scheduling due to some of the libraries being early voting locations. The researcher did not foresee these two issues being a problem, but worked around them. Many participants did not have cars and had to rely on public transportation to get to and from the interview locations. Luckily, most of the local libraries were located on busy through streets where connections to buses and trains were easily accessible. The researcher wondered if this issue impacted the number of people recruited from the very far South Side of Chicago, such as in Roseland, where the public transit lines do not overlap as much as they do in other parts of the city.

Recruitment for participants in the study unearthed an interesting connection to the phenomenon studied. Many people were interested in the study regardless of whether the person met the qualifications for the study. The researcher was inundated with calls from people who were interested in her study. After numerous phone calls from people who could not participate in the study, the researcher concluded that people have a deep desire to talk about the phenomenon of having a parent incarcerated. Many of the people

who could not participate in the study were simply too old for the study or had a parent incarcerated during a different developmental stage. The most surprising finding was that the researcher had a handful of calls from previously incarcerated parents who wanted to be in the study but were ineligible due to other reasons. The researcher concluded from the wide interest in the study that there is a desire to talk about this experience, but no socially acceptable outlet where these people can discuss the experience either with one other person or with a group. Therefore, this area of study is ripe for other qualitative studies about this experience.

Of the people who qualified for the study, there was a mix of men and women, parents and non-parents, and the ages of participants spanned the age range that was targeted. However, the researcher found that the participants who were closest to age 29 or 30 had the greatest ability to complete the research process (i.e., completing all three interviews) and had the most reflective capacity throughout the research interviews. The researcher found that the interested participants who were parents had a harder time scheduling and showing up for the interviews. The researcher made the assumption that in this particular study, having a child created a barrier to coming to a community space to be interviewed. Perhaps one reason was that this group of interested participants has a lower socioeconomic status, which highlights the difficulty that this population faces when one has to balance work, school, and child care. The researcher wondered if there would have been a higher response rate from interested participants that had children if the interviews had happened in the participant's home and not out in the community. This question should be kept in mind when planning a study with this specific subsection of this population or when planning a group for people with incarcerated parents. Therefore,

child care would need to be provided to allow for some of these interested participants to be able to participate.

Recruitment took place in the West and South Sides of Chicago. Interestingly, most of the participants resided on the South Side of Chicago at the time of the study. Throughout the interviews, the researcher heard participants discuss the reality of having to move during their childhoods. Some participants lived on the West Side of Chicago during their childhoods. The Chicagoland area was described to the researcher by some of the participants as the West Side of the city being slightly more dangerous, as were parts of the South Side, but that there were some quieter neighborhoods on the South Side. However, the North Side of the city was considered to be the quietest.

There was a safety concern due to the population and the areas that the researcher recruited, since the areas were considered to be high in crime. The researcher followed her safety plan throughout the process. However, the researcher noticed that she was influenced by an unconscious message received from the IRB and her committee. There seemed to be a real worry that the population she would be studying might be or could become aggressive or violent. Through the recruitment and data collection phase the researcher came to realize that this unconscious message was false. The researcher's experience of the population studied was that the sections of the population that self-selected to be in the study were not aggressive or violent. The researcher's experience was that this population just wanted to know more about themselves and to help the researcher with this topic. The researcher even found that most participants tried to take care of the researcher. Some participants wanted to schedule their subsequent interviews when it was more convenient for the researcher. The researcher assured the participants

that the scheduling needed to be when it was best for them. There were numerous participants who let the researcher know what they looked like, either by verbal descriptions or by providing a picture, so that the research pair knew who to look for at the local public libraries. The researcher found that this population was very gentle and non-aggressive. This population was also very interested in the final results of the study.

Interview Process

The researcher found that over the course of the three interviews, for those participants who completed all three interviews, the work got deeper each time. With each interview, the participant had more trust in the researcher and the research relationship, which allowed him or hers to share more details and emotions. This phenomenon also showed up in each individual interview, where over the course of the hour, the participant became more and more comfortable, which allowed him or her to relax and therefore share more. Many of the participants wanted to know if the researcher knew of any groups that met to talk about this topic. The researcher had to inform these interested participants that she did not know of any such groups offhand. At least two of the participants seemed to be participating in the study for altruistic reasons. These two participants stated that they hoped others would learn from their lives and that they wanted to be role models for those people still struggling with this experience. It seemed important to these participants to show their community that one can be successful even in the face of adversity.

Each of the participants was racially different from the researcher. However, this fact did not become a barrier to individuals participating and sharing their stories. At the end

of the interview process, the participants were asked what it was like to share their stories with someone of a different race; each of them stated that he or she did not feel like that had an impact on it. Some participants shared in the final interview they were initially a little skeptical because of the harm done in the past to African-American communities by the medical profession. Each participant stated in his or her own way that once he or she figured out that the researcher was interested in his or her stories and was not judging them for his or her parent's actions he or she seemed to trust the researcher more.

Some participants were able to complete all three interviews. Other participants could only manage one or two completed interviews. The researcher believed that there were many reasons behind not completing all three research interviews. The first reason was ambivalence and avoidance to the research process; for some people, after the first interview it became too psychologically overwhelming or scary for them to continue talking about the topic further. A second reason that could have prevented a participant from completing all three interviews was lower socioeconomic status, which would have had ramifications including that the length of time it would take him or her to travel on public transit was not worth telling his or her personal story or receiving the financial incentive; the library's open hours interfered with the participant's work schedule; or the participant's class schedule did not have the flexibility the participant wanted in order to allow them to participate in the study. The researcher acknowledged that there was an infinite number of possibilities as to why the participants had trouble following through on completing three interviews or did not return the researcher's phone calls.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the phenomenological data used a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, which included four basic steps. The transcendental-phenomenological analysis included the following steps (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122):

1. Researcher created a full description of her experience of the phenomenon.
2. Researcher then analyzed each participant's interview transcript in the following ways:
 - a. Examined each statement for its significance to the description of the experience,
 - b. Identified all significant statements,
 - c. Listed all the invariant horizons (all nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping, meaningful statements),
 - d. Examined invariant meaning units and clustered them into themes,
 - e. Created a textured description through analyzing invariant meaning units and themes,
 - f. Created a structured description of the experience through reflection and imaginative variation,
 - g. Created a textural-structural description from the meanings and essences of the experiences.
3. Researcher completed steps a through g with all participants' experiences from a verbatim transcript.

4. Researcher synthesized all experiences and created a composite textual-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience: a universal description of the experience that is representative of the group's experience.

By using this phenomenological approach to analyze the data, the conscious meanings, intentions, and lived experiences of the phenomenon emerged from the data. The following are considered the core processes of transcendental phenomenology, through which the data was observed to understand and gain knowledge: epoche, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). This first core process was called epoche. The online version of the Merriam-Webster (2013) dictionary defined epoche as the following: "suspension of judgment; the methodological attitude of phenomenology in which one refrains from judging whether anything exists or can exist as the first step in the phenomenological recognition, comprehension, and description of senses." Suspending judgment requires the inquirer to look at the phenomenon in a new way, which makes the person focus on what he or she sees before them (Moustakas, 1994). "In the epoche, the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide-open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). The first step of the analysis was that the researcher within her own epoche process set aside her judgments and experiences with the phenomenon being studied. This process allowed the researcher to come to the participant material with an open mind ready to receive new ideas and themes that surfaced from the material. This process might seem like the researcher doubted the experience or previous knowledge, which she did not; the only doubt she had was that she knew what knowledge she was looking for in

advance (Moustakas, 1994). For that reason, setting aside of biases was an important part of every participant interview to allow the essence of the phenomenon to come through in the interview.

The second core process of transcendental phenomenology was transcendental-phenomenological reduction. It was transcendental because the inquirer was looking past the everyday meanings to procure a deeper understanding (Moustakas, 1994). It was phenomenological because it made the inquirer look at the experience in smaller and more distinct phenomena than a continuous experience (Moustakas, 1994). When using this process, the different aspects of the experience are looked at in their uniqueness; thus, the phenomena were then described in this new way, incorporating the totality of all aspects of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Thus, the second step in the analysis was informed by transcendental-phenomenological reduction. This part of the process was done in four steps: bracketing, horizontalizing, clustering the horizons into themes, and organizing the horizons and themes into a coherent textual description (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing was where the focus of the research was placed into brackets and everything else was pushed to the side so that the research process was rooted in the research question (Moustakas, 1994). As the data were compiled, each sentence was treated as if it had equal value to all the others. In horizontalizing, statements that were irrelevant or repetitive were taken out, which left only the horizons; the texts that were exemplars of the essence and meaning of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The third step was to cluster the horizons into different themes that were important to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Lastly, these horizons and themes were placed into a larger context that creates a coherent narrative of the

experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This process was how a textural description was derived from the essences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

The third core process in transcendental phenomenology was imaginative variation. As Husserl described this process as cited in Moustakas (1994):

The function of imaginative variation is to arrive at a “structural” differentiation among the infinite multiplicities of actual and possible cognitions that relate to the object in question and thus can somehow go together to make up the unity of an identifying synthesis (Husserl, 1977, p. 63).

Imaginative variation was an important process of the analysis of the data. By looking at the different variations of the essences of the phenomenon, a structural definition was constructed so that the conditions and experiences connected with it were understood (Moustakas, 1994). Because of the variation, the researcher looked at all aspects of the phenomenon and tried to account for what different situations could have brought this experience about. Similar to transcendental-phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation had four steps to ensure that all possible variations were considered. The first step was to systematically explore the varying possible structural meanings that underline the textural meanings found in the previous stage (Moustakas, 1994). Once all possible explanations were explored, recognizing the underlying themes or contexts that account for the inception of the phenomenon were considered (Moustakas, 1994). This process entailed looking at the data from all participants for the multiple true experiences or essences of the phenomenon to gain a richer understanding. After recognizing different aspects of the phenomenon, the next step was to consider the universal structures, such as

thoughts and feelings connected with the phenomenon, relationships to others and self, time, space, material things, body sensations, causality, etc. in relation to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This stage helped the researcher incorporate all aspects of the phenomenon that the participant experienced or felt influenced the situation as a way to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon on all levels. The final step in this process was to search for an example from the data that illustrated the themes and helped develop the structural description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Consequently, the researcher mined the data for quotations that were examples of the theme or the point the researcher was trying to convey about the essence of the experience.

Lastly, the fourth and final step in the entire process of analyzing the data was to combine and integrate the textural essences derived from transcendental-phenomenological reduction and the structural essences from imaginative variation to produce a well-rounded synthesis of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This process helped the researcher obtain the essences of the experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence. Throughout the data collection and data analysis, the researcher met regularly with her dissertation chair to discuss data collection and analysis. These discussions about the research experience and data allowed for accuracy, validity, and reliability in understanding the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Smith et al., 2009).

Statement on Protecting the Rights of Human Subjects

Participants were told that their participation was voluntary and confidential and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without negatively affecting the

relationship with the researcher or the Institute for Clinical Social Work. If participants became emotional (e.g., tearful, any significant changes in body language or voice) the researcher stopped the process and checked in with the participant to evaluate the participant's emotional state. If the evaluation determined that the participant was in significant emotional distress, the researcher stopped the research interview, provided immediate debriefing, and determined the needs of the participant for further professional response. If the participant was assessed to need further professional help, the participant was given an index card with the names and numbers of three clinical social workers that would be available to the participant for up to three debriefing sessions at no cost to them. Although some of the participants experienced significant emotion, none of them asked to stop the interview process. The researcher assessed the participants to see if the interviews should continue, but none of the participant assessments indicated that the interview should be stopped. The following are the names of the people or agencies who would have provided the services: the Adult Clinic at the Institute for Psychoanalysis at 773-270-2652; Community Counseling Centers of Chicago (C4) at 773-769-0205; and Cathedral Counseling at 312-252-9500, x130. One participant did ask for the index card, not because she was in distress, but because the interview process got her interested in exploring the therapeutic relationship. The researcher also provided her phone number in case the participants wanted to contact her regarding any distress that occurred subsequent to the research interviews. None of the participants called the researcher to report any distress after the interviews. All participants were reminded that they had the right to not answer any questions they chose or to skip certain topics of discussion.

The researcher reviewed the research protocol, the nature of the research questions, and the Institute for Clinical Social Work Individual Consent for Participation in Research form (see Appendix E) with each research participant prior to the first interview. Before signing the consent form, each participant was asked a number of questions to assess that he or she understood his or her rights as a participant (see Appendix D). All participants read and signed two copies of the consent form, which the researcher then witnessed with her own signature. Each participant received one copy, and the researcher retained the second copy in a locked file cabinet separate from other research data.

All participants were identified by a code number and were given pseudonyms, as was any other important person in his or her narrative. For tracking purposes, the sheet with the code numbers and names was kept separately from the research data in a locked file cabinet. Digital voice recordings were transcribed as soon as possible and were destroyed once the study was completed. During the transcription process, all identifying information, including but not limited to names, addresses, court proceedings, details about the crimes, and prison information were disguised. All research materials and data were secured and will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for five years.

All information that was gathered during the study was available for review by the participants, either as a full transcript, in written summary form, or as reported verbally to them in person or by phone.

Chapter IV

Results

The following six chapters present the textural analysis's six horizons of what was experienced and the two imaginative variations that inform how the experience was formed. The experience of having an incarcerated parent is conceptually organized underneath horizons, each with its own chapter, which are followed by imaginative variations to these horizons as separate chapters. A synthesis chapter called the textural-structural analysis ties these chapters together. This introductory chapter to the results provides a description of the study's participants and continues with a description of the study's horizons and the imaginative variations that were laid out in the methodology chapter.

Participants

This study drew interest from 39 potential participants from the city of Chicago. There were six participants interviewed for a total of 15 in-depth interviews. The interview structure consisted of up to three in-depth semi-structured interviews with each participant. Between the six study participants, their parents were convicted of charges that ranged from gun charges to conspiracy charges, drug charges, and murder charges. Participants were African-American men and women and were evenly split three men

and three women. All participants reported finishing high school, with one participant obtaining a GED instead of a high school diploma. None of the participants have completed a college or vocational degree. Most participants described working towards a college degree but having had to drop out for various family or monetary reasons. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 29 years old. Two participants described having spent time in jail for various reasons.

The study's population provided it's own challenges. As stated before, there were 39 people potentially interested in participating in the study. However, getting a hold of potential participants proved to be problematic. Some potential participants were unreachable because of disconnected or shut off phone numbers. Other participants, who had children, struggled to make it into a scheduled interview. Children were experienced as a barrier to participation in this study. These potential participants had a hard time making it into a local library or community center due to the logistics of work and childcare. The lower socioeconomic status of this population indicated that hiring a babysitter to watch the children was out of the question. If the study had been structured differently, where interviews could have been done in the home, these potential participants could have participated.

The researcher struggled to keep in touch with the participants who participated. For one reason or another some participants would not return the researcher's phone calls or attempts to schedule another interview. Again, this could be because of the population's lower socioeconomic status. The researcher also wondered if the rest of the potential participants were hard to reach because of the weather. Participant recruitment started during the winter months, when seasonal jobs were harder to find. The researcher found it

harder to get a hold of potential participants starting in mid-March and continuing through the summer months. The researcher wondered if this had to do with job opportunities that opened up for this population around that time. Below is a short synopsis of each of the participants that participated in the study.

Jeremiah is a single African-American 29-year-old male. Jeremiah self-identified as believing in God. He spoke about his older sibling who was his father figure, who was incarcerated. Jeremiah was on the cusp of becoming a teenager when his sibling went to prison for a life sentence. Jeremiah lived with his mother, who was his subsequent parent. Jeremiah's father had died years before his brother was incarcerated. He was one of five children of his parents. Jeremiah's family decided to split up because of economic reasons, with some of his siblings living with an extended family member. He chose to live with his mother to be close to his incarcerated brother. Jeremiah and his mother struggled to pay bills and ended up living in a car for some time until they got on their feet. Jeremiah was hospitalized during high school for suicidal ideation and received therapy. He worked during high school. Jeremiah described visiting his brother regularly over the years, and he was allowed to have a relationship with him unencumbered by his mother. He has various forms of contact with his incarcerated brother: mail, phone, and in-person visits. Jeremiah was attracted to this study for altruistic reasons, in hopes of helping others understand the phenomenon and disseminate the work.

Aliyah is a single African-American 28-year-old female. Aliyah self-identified as not believing in any religion or faith. She spoke about her mother's incarceration. Aliyah's mother went to prison during her preschool years and did not return till after her adolescence. Her mother was sentenced to at least 20 years in prison. Aliyah stayed with

extended family members and family friends before ultimately living with her father, who was her subsequent parent. She stated she was one of many children between her parents but one of two children of her father. Aliyah and her father moved multiple times during her time living with him. On her own volition she applied to and went to a boarding school during part of her high school career. She shared that her grandfather used to take her to visit her mother until he died. She did not visit her mother while living with her father, since he and her mother did not have a good relationship. Aliyah described that she did not visit her mother regularly until after high school, when she could go on her own. During high school, Aliyah had the most contact with her mother through mail. Aliyah was attracted to the study for personal reasons, in hopes to understand her own experience better.

Trinity is a single African-American 26-year-old female. Trinity self-identified as believing in God. She spoke about her mother's and father's incarcerations. Her mother was in and out of prison for most of Trinity's life, starting at a young age. Trinity's father has been incarcerated for her entire life and will continue to be because of life sentences. Trinity lived with her subsequent parent, her grandmother, from the beginning of her life. She stated that she was the only child of her mother's, but one of many of her father's children. Trinity described living with her grandmother and aunts throughout her life until she moved out after high school. She described visiting her mother in prison once and stated that she has never been back to visit either her mother or father again. Trinity has a relationship with her mother because of her maternal side's urging; however, her relationship with her father has been encumbered by negative feelings from her grandmother. Trinity did not have much contact with her mother during her prison stays.

She has not had any contact with her father during his life sentences. Trinity was attracted to the study for personal reasons, in hopes of understanding her experience better.

Vernon is a single African-American 19-year-old male. Vernon did not give any indication as to whether he believed in religion or God. He spoke about his father's incarceration. Vernon was on the cusp of adolescence when his father went to prison for the first time. His father spent Vernon's adolescence in and out of prison. Vernon initially stayed with his mother but ended up living with his subsequent parental figure, his grandmother. He stated he was one of two children of his parents. Vernon described how important his friends were and that they were like family to him, since he does not get along with his biological family. Vernon described only visiting his father a few times due to the difficulty of seeing him behind bars. He described that he did not have much of a relationship with either of his parents. Vernon was attracted to the study for personal reasons, in hopes of understanding his experience better.

Xavior is a single African-American 29-year-old male. Xavior self-identified as believing in God. He spoke about his father's incarceration. Xavior was just starting high school when his father was sentenced to three years in prison. Xavior stayed with his mother, who was his subsequent parent. Xavior stated that he had one sibling. He described a stable housing situation. Xavior stated he worked during high school for his own spending money. He described regular visits to see his incarcerated father. Xavior also shared that he had a relationship with his father that was unencumbered by others. He had many forms of contact while his father was in prison: mail, phone calls, and in-person visits. Xavior was attracted to the study for personal reasons to talk about the experience in a new way.

Destiny is a single African-American 29-year-old female. Destiny self-identified as believing in God. She spoke about her father's incarceration. Her father entered prison before she was a teenager and was released when she was in her twenties. Destiny lived with her mother, who was her subsequent parent. She stated that she was one of many siblings of her father's children. Destiny described that she was involved in many activities in high school. Her home life was stable and she was able to visit her father's side of the family on school holidays. Destiny's relationship and visits with her father were unencumbered by her mother. Her father's side of the family took her to visit her father. She had in-person visits and phone calls from her father while he was in prison. Destiny was attracted to the study for altruistic reasons, in hopes of helping others who are experiencing what she had experienced.

Textural Analysis

The textual analysis consists of six major chapters that inform the reader about what is experienced when this phenomenon occurs. The following form the six major horizons: the influence of parental incarceration on the developmental experience, the emotional influence of parental incarceration, the social influence of parental incarceration, the spiritual influence of parental incarceration, practical aspects of the experience, and external environmental aspects of parental incarceration. The horizons are briefly described below.

Influence of Parental Incarceration on the Developmental Experience presents influences that the study participants felt were important during their experience. The concepts that surfaced were aspects of the experience that had no other home other than

in the psychological realm. Participants described different lessons and internal experiences that influenced their experience and development.

Emotional Influence of Parental Incarceration presents the role emotions played throughout the experience. Participants described the different emotions and emotional states that they faced during their adolescence. The concepts described in this chapter all influenced, in one way or another, the participant's developmental process in adolescence.

Social Influence of Parental Incarceration presents the role that family and friends played for the participants. Participants described in this chapter the concepts that were important to the social parts of themselves during adolescence. Participants described how they traversed their adolescence while dealing with an incarcerated parent.

Spiritual Influence of Parental Incarceration presents the role of religion and faith during the experience of having an incarcerated parent. Participants described the importance of faith and how it helped them make sense of the experience during adolescence.

Practical Aspects of the Experience presents the aspects of life that were impacted by a parent going to prison. Participants described people, places, and processes that changed due to having an incarcerated parent.

External Environmental Aspects of Parental Incarceration described how society and policies in the everyday world were experienced. Participants described how poverty and societal influences influenced the way they interacted with the world.

Structural Synthesis

The structural analysis includes imaginative variants. There were two major imaginative variants: psychodynamic forces and assumptions about parents. These two imaginative variants were formed from understanding the data and reflecting on the participant's experience of the phenomenon. The two major imaginative variants are briefly described below.

Psychodynamic Forces presents the defenses and emotional experiences that were described by the participants. Although the participants did not describe their actions as defenses, it was clear that there were specific ones that were used to manage and process the experience. Although the participants did not have the same emotional experience, they shared a common experience that indicated that their experience was different than that of those who had suffered other losses.

Assumptions about Parents present how the experience changed the participant's assumptions about his or her parents. The experience of having an incarcerated parent challenges the assumptions the participants had about their parents and parental mores. This chapter describes which parental mores were challenged and how the participants dealt with them.

Textural-Structural Description

This chapter is an integrated analysis of what the phenomenon of having an incarcerated parent is and how it is experienced. The themes and concepts in the textual and structural chapters informed and helped form the integrated description. The textural-structural analysis describes the three key variables of truth, relationship with the

incarcerated parent, and availability of an attuned subsequent parent that influence experience and the participant's level of adaptation in the world.

Summary

This introductory chapter acquainted the reader with the population and the study's participants. Each participant's experience informed the following nine chapters through the creation of the six horizons that define the textual experience and the two imaginative variants that inform the structural experience. The textual-structural description is an integrated understanding of the phenomenon experienced by the participants and others like them.

Chapter V

Horizon #1: Influence of Parental Incarceration on the Developmental Experience

Participants described many aspects of the experience that were psychologically influential. The following section is broken down into the following concepts: growing up fast, learning lessons from the incarcerated parent, the experience being out of their control, “I still had to grow up,” what is lost, vulnerability, mastering the experience, dehumanization, and sense of time. This section ties together the participant’s internal experience of having an incarcerated parent during one’s adolescence and how it is experienced in the present day.

Concept #1: Growing Up Fast

Participants described that they felt they had to grow up faster than their peers, regardless of when they found out about the parental incarceration. Jeremiah described this concept in relation to his brother:

Well, you know, hearing it come from him, knowing that I always looked up to him, it was, um, like a little tear for my momma. Because it was like me at a young age jumping into being a man, grown man, so I am looking like, man, he just told me to watch over the fence, now I am the man of the house, I feeling like

stick my chest out like, like the things that goes on in the house now, I got the say so.

Some participants discussed having to take care of their siblings in the house, either because the subsequent parent abdicated their responsibilities or it was out of necessity due to the parent's work schedule. Aliyah described growing up fast in that way: "So then I kind of, you know, got put in a role of being head of the house, watching my little sister and making sure, you know, things were okay. Dinner was cooked and stuff like that." Not all participants had to take on extra house duties or childcare duties; however, they still felt as if these experiences made them grow up faster than they normally would have. Xavier's statement described this feeling perfectly:

So I feel like I had to be the male figure; like, it was not to the point I had to have any extra duties or curricular activities. It was feeling like maybe the more manly the thing they did not want to do, I had to get into that part, but like chores around, but I really even, really with chores, I mean, I did not have too many of those, but I just felt like I was the man of the house since my father was not there.

Concept #2: Learning Lessons from the Incarcerated Parent

The participant stories indicated that participants learned many lessons from his or her incarcerated parent. Many participants talked about how they learned a lot about what it was like to be in prison from the incarcerated parent. These stories allowed the participants to realize that prison was not an experience they wanted in their own lives. Destiny expressed how her father taught her lessons even though she had to learn it the hard way:

How I understand things, or how I help other people understand it, but that is pretty much me and my philosophy, watching my dad going in and out of jail and definitely not going to end up like him. I am okay with having the experiences but as long as I come out with a different outlook.

Xavior on the other hand learned right away from his father's mistakes:

Um, maybe the knowledge, but I would not say that it shaped me, because I would not feel that, um, he was always, he was the man of the house anyway, so I would not feel like that his jail knowledge influenced me, but it pretty much, it taught me that, that it is a place that I would never want to go.

The participants that visited their incarcerated parents indicated that a role reversal happened between them and their incarcerated parents. Jeremiah described something that most participants who had a functional relationship with their incarcerated parent did:

Right, like he was my eyes coming up, and now, while he away, I am his eyes and ears, you know basically watching things that he cannot see right now. So basically that is how it went. It was really, it was really strange when I was thinking about it, at a young age, now he is looking up to me: man, it feels very awkward.

However, Jeremiah and his brother dealt with the awkwardness, which deepened their relationship. With this role reversal, participants shared that they felt they had to teach the parent and to keep them alive while behind bars. Participants used faith and the Bible to give their incarcerated parents strength to keep on going in prison. Some incarcerated

parents would not allow themselves to be influenced by their adolescent. Vernon described this experience:

Yeah. It was like, I do not know. It was just like, I felt like I did not want to see him get locked up, you know, I mean, nobody want to see people get locked up, so, you know, trying to talk to him and stuff like that. And when you just come to the realization that the person is not going to stop doing what they doing, you got to be like, you know, I cannot keep telling you this if you not going to listen, you feel me? If you are not going to listen, there's no reason for me to keep wasting my breath.

Concept #3: Experience Being Out of the Participant's Control

Almost all participants alluded to the fact that the experience of having an incarcerated parent was thrust upon them. Xavior expressed this fact with clarity:

There was nothing I could do...I just, like, if he was there, so like, I could not, you know, say it was a bad thing, I cannot say it was a good thing. I was a kid, so it was, I would just...I did not want him to go.

Participants described that they never would have willingly chosen this experience. Many participants indicated they felt helpless at different times during the experience, with what was happening to both them and their parents. Participants described the wish to influence the courts, prison, or their parents in order to have control or agency over events happening to them. Aliyah shared what it was like to live without her mother even though her mother could not make the situation better:

Like no, like, you are going to just tell me that it will be okay and that is it. I am still the one living here, living through this and there is nothing no one can do about it. No one can take me out of here, 'cause where else am I going to go? Who else am I going to go with?

However, participants stated that the hardest part of the experience was the isolation they felt when the prison went temporarily on lockdown and they could not communicate with the imprisoned parent. The study's participants also indicated other pressures and messages that were placed on them because of having an incarcerated parent. Destiny described a conversation with someone about her life choices and her incarcerated father: "Like, you know, I used to be a little tidbits [information] like that, oh, like, you have been to jail before, yeah. They are like, ah, I guess it runs in the family." Pressures from societal messages about how their parent was a bad person and the participants are better off without them were placed on the participants without their permission. These messages were dealt with in different ways. Overall, the experience was explained to be out of one's control, and others made enormous decisions that impacted the participants' lives in a big way. Aliyah expressed this feeling succinctly: "Like after the verdict...we were just like, ahhh, it just felt like the biggest part of your life was just taken away from you. From those...after those few sentences."

Concept #4: "I Still Had to Grow Up"

Participants described how this experience at first feels as if the world should stop. However, participants acknowledged that the world did not stop and they had to continue to grow up. Xavior described how this phenomenon is experienced:

Like, you know, I looked at it like, I do not know, I just felt like I could never, um, break down about the situation – not in the same fact of being close with my father, but I just felt like it was never a big deal for me, just even, it never really affected my life. You know, even though the absence because he was gone, I like just feel like my life still had to go on, and that, you know, he will be okay, and time is time going on, you know, we got to talk to him and hearing him talking to him on the phone, going to see him – but I felt like I still had duties to do in my life, you know; I still had to grow up.

The sentiment that they would have given anything to have their incarcerated parent home was palpable. Aliyah shared just how much she wanted her mother in her life: “Just how to talk to them, and it is true that there are certain things that you can only get from the same sex, a father cannot be a mother and a mother cannot be a father.” Some participants were better able to “grow up” and continue on with their lives than others. The participants who were able to continue to develop expressed that they had a subsequent parent who parented them and allowed them to have a relationship with the incarcerated parent. This relationship with the incarcerated parent allowed for the adolescent and parent to rebuild trust by the parent telling the truth about what landed the parent in prison. This type of communication, whether it consisted of visits, phone calls, or letters, allowed participants the chance to focus on their own lives. Jeremiah described having a great amount of contact with his incarcerated parent, but still felt that he had to grow up fast, being the man of the house:

So, you know, man, it felt good hearing it from him, but, you know, him telling me that, I was like, man, it is hard, but now I have to live up to it. So I cannot let

him down and I have to do it for myself and also for my mom, so, you know, that is why I did the right things and stayed away from trouble.

Concept #5: What Is Lost

The participants described many types of losses they faced while their parent was incarcerated. There were many physical or tangible aspects that were lost when a parent became incarcerated, such as income. This financial loss impacted the participant and family at a very real level because it tied to the subsequent parent's ability to continue to provide a roof over the participant's head and to put food on the table. Aliyah described what it was like to live with many tangible worries:

Not, yeah, not worrying about dangers and if my sisters would be able to pay for this or to be able to, you know, get us this or buy us food. 'Cause we were with her, that she was married and she had two daughters herself, so, it was like, you were around an adult, 'cause, you know, my sister was only like 17, 18, 19. And took care of us for a few years. So it just felt normal. You know, I felt like I did not have to worry about any shootings or anything dangerous [in response to where she moved after her sister's house].

Many participants talked about the lack of money necessitating moves out of familiar neighborhoods and schools where they had friends and familiar teachers. These moves and lack of income also impacted the teenager's ability to be involved in after-school activities. Jeremiah described how his brother's incarceration impacted his life:

Well, it explains a whole lot what I wanted to become, like, um, it shattered it, the dream. I let go of that. I was in school and I was playing sports. I wanted to be

that basketball player, that next superstar. It shattered that because I did not have that protection or whatever, or I should say the drive to keep going, of doing that. I kind of laid back off, so that is why I was thinking like, man, um, I am not even fitting to um, do basketball no more, those dreams are nothing. And then that is when I came to switching up now like I need to find that job, that fitting to provide for myself in there. It kind of shattered my dreams, my whole big dreams of being a sports star.

Sometimes participants did not have a choice of after-school activities because they had to be home to watch younger siblings. What was also lost was the actual relationship with the incarcerated parent. The incarcerated parent is not missed because of money and physical things, but for the functions and capacities the parent held for his or her adolescent. All of the participants indicated that they felt their parent's guidance and protection disappear when the parent went to prison. Participants also talked about the loss of connection, love, and, for some, communication when the parent was imprisoned. Aliyah described what she felt was the biggest loss during adolescence:

But, um, I think one of the biggest things was moving [in] with a single father and not having a woman to guide me or, you know, teach me certain things. You basically have to learn, you know, a lot on your own.

All participants touched on having lost some sense of "normalcy" in the family unit throughout their narratives. Xavior described that he felt like he missed out on some things but not too much since his father came home:

He knew everything that was going on for, you know, everything in that household, so I think he decided he was, like, he was not, it was not that, like, we

were actually, like, I actually, like, really think I missed him but, like, did not really miss him. Like, you know, he is my father, of course I am going to miss you 'cause you were not home, but I saw him so much.

Experiences were stolen from them, such as having the incarcerated parent be at one's high school graduation, at school dances, or be there for the day-to-day things during adolescence when the same-sex parent's presence is desired. Destiny described how at first it was not too bad that her father was incarcerated, but after a long time it becomes hard: "After you have so many birthdays...and he's not there." Participants alluded to the stigma that was placed on them because of the parent's actions. Participants also felt a loss of connection to friends and others because of this stigma. The stigma of having an incarcerated parent carries the implication that participants are similar to their mothers or fathers. This external pressure led participants to describe how they tried to downplay or not tell anyone that they had an incarcerated loved one so that they could be considered more "normal."

Concept #6: Vulnerability

Participants talked about how different they felt compared to their peers because of this phenomenon. They reported that not being able to talk about the experience with people made them feel different and vulnerable compared to their peers. Aliyah described her vulnerability in the following way:

I think I just felt like I only share what I wanted to share, and really, if it was really, like, something deep and emotional, I probably did not share it, 'cause I

think I just always felt vulnerable so much that, you feel that on the inside, you do not really want to display that a lot.

This vulnerability was not always conscious but was felt by the participants. Some participants described how their subsequent parent or family described the incarcerated parent as vulnerable. This parental vulnerability was used as the reason the parent was in prison. A few participants stated that they worried about retaliation for their parent's crime. Thus, they were "vulnerable" in a real sense because of the parent's actions and feared that they might lose their life for it. Jeremiah described what this experience was like:

Yeah. And it would make you think, like, I was saying like, when it first went, repercussions could be behind family member of the person that got killed, is they come after his family. When somebody knows that me and him was always together, would they try to take it out or earn some points by trying to hurt me? Yeah. Because I am, um, fearing now for my life, as far as what is the outcome from his family or friends he had, the guy had that got killed. Is they going to try, you know, come back and get somebody close to him or something like that?

Concept #7: Mastery of the Experience

All participants in some way described an attempt to master and understand the experience of the parent going to prison. The process of mastering the experience involved feeling as though everyone learned a lesson, as well as having open and honest conversations with the incarcerated parent. These participants also described conversations with their family members to understand the experience. The conversations

with family members were described as supportive and allowed for participants to ask questions and find answers. These participants felt support from others outside of their family, which included communities of faith, therapists, and/or friends. Jeremiah shared that he found talking with others about it was the best way to process it:

Well, you know, um, I used to do the little, ah, um, I speak to the youths on the after school and tell them the side, the stuff that is going on in jail and what they should do, like, you know, school is the best, safest places you can be in at a young age, if you are having problems at home you can always go to [an] after-school program or talk to your counselor or social worker and let them know what you going through before you try to take matters into your own hands. I explain to them, like, I am not just talking to be talking, 'cause I have a brother, I explained, I have [a] brother locked up and it's, like, tearing the family up.

On the one hand, participants who had support felt as though they were not alone in the experience. On the other hand, participants who were not at peace with the experience were still looking for answers to questions that they felt they could not ask the incarcerated parent. These participants attempted to understand their parent and master the experience through other methods, such as by watching television crime shows. Trinity discussed watching crime shows in an attempt to understand why a person would commit crimes:

And then you get to thinking, and I mean, um, I look at a lot of them datelines crime shows a lot. A lady, there was one show on there where a lady kidnapped a lady and cut her baby out of her stomach and wanted to pass the baby off as hers.

And I am like, that is demonic. It's evil. To even do that, so, my thing is that some people really do like it evil.

These participants coveted family shows on television because they desired an intact family and normalcy. Aliyah described trying to master the experience through the books she read because her incarcerated parent and extended family members did not have answers to her questions. She also used music to give voice to her experience: "When I became a teenager and moved to this new place, I would get away through music." Many participants described asking extended family members the simplest questions to find out more information about the parent when there was no communication with the incarcerated parent.

Concept #8: Dehumanization

The participant narratives described a dehumanizing aspect connected to the experience of having an incarcerated parent. The participants who were able to visit the incarcerated parent described the visiting process to be dehumanizing and degrading. Visitors went through screenings and strip searches before visiting with their loved one. Jeremiah described what he had to go through just to see his brother:

Right, you know, to go, to go visit him, it would be the rough part, starting because, you know, you have to go through the strip searching, pat downs, and all this, it's like you are getting your privacy violated. You got a man telling you to squat and do all of this, take your clothes off, then when you go see him.

Participants described feeling guilty by association when going through the visiting process. Jeremiah also described how some of the visiting rooms were set up:

You go and they give you, you have a desk with [an] old window in there with a hole in it. And you talk through the window. And, um, you know, you all get to have your little talk, and our hugs would be our hands to hands on the glass. And then we will have to um, really talk through there while you got a guard behind you, 'cause in the visiting room, you got like about six little chairs there, and the blockers where you are having your visits, somebody else having a visit and they talk and you got a guard going back and forth. And not be comfortable because you sitting on a hard metal stool, circle, you sitting on there and you would be like aw, no I cannot do this, but you try to have the willpower to do it for him.

Participants went off on tangents that did not seem to connect to the experience; however, after careful consideration, the tangents about zombies, ghosts, and traitors all pointed to the dehumanizing aspect of the experience of having an incarcerated parent.

Concept #9: Sense of Time

All the participants alluded to a sense of time in their narratives. Many participants described how long the criminal justice process takes. Participants described the hope they had of the imprisoned parent returning home soon during the time prior to the conviction. Jeremiah shared what his sense of time was like before the parent's conviction:

I had the chance to go visit him and um, you know it is going to be a couple of days and everything will be over with. So then a couple of days went and started

turning into weeks and months, and um, I am like, wait, what is going on? And he was like, man, I have to fight it, 'cause it's a serious case.

After the criminal justice system decided on conviction, participants described how time slowed down and seemed to drag on. Life without their incarcerated parent seemed to be slower than it had been with the parent present in his or her life. The researcher found that most participants described some aspect of their narrative with the following: "I remember it like it was yesterday." This statement indicated that some part of the experience or memory still holds intense emotion or was traumatic. Trauma and temporality will be described in depth in a later chapter.

The previous nine concepts inform the internal experience of this phenomenon. Participant narratives touched on numerous concepts that described what these participants experienced psychologically by their parent being incarcerated and away from them. These concepts are only one part of what is experienced by an adolescent when his or her parent is incarcerated. These experiences demonstrate that some aspects of the experience are felt to be in the participant's control and other parts are thrust upon them. The psychological realm is just one piece of the overall phenomenological puzzle.

Chapter VI

Horizon #2: Emotional Influence of Parental Incarceration

The emotional experience of having an incarcerated parent is complex. After focusing on the internal and external emotional experience of the participant the concepts of the demands placed on participants, stigma, trauma, grief and mourning, the role of imagination, needs and desires, unanswered questions, trust, and truth are each explored.

Concept #1: External and Internal Demands Placed on Participants

Through the participant stories it became clear that the participants felt demands were placed on them. Some described demands that came from inside themselves, such as the drive to take care of others. Jeremiah described his internal pressure:

Raising his [kids], like they're mine. Because, you know they calling me, I need this here and this and the other. You know, my mom's the type, she will, okay, I cannot do for all three of them, I am doing you this week, this one next week, you know, spread them out. Just so they all be good. So that is how it is. That is why, like, my life came to where I had a kid, then you know, like, I got a whole life story to tell them and a lot of experience to go through with them...

Other participants described forces that were not internal but came from their environment. Destiny felt there were demands placed on her from inside her family: “Yeah. And it does not even come from outside. Ah, necessarily, a lot of times it comes from in that household.” These external demands placed on the participants came in various forms. A strong external demand felt by participants was to not talk about the incarcerated parent with people outside the family. Some participants whose parents abdicated their parenting responsibilities placed an external demand on the participant to not only parent themselves, but to parent their other siblings as well. Vernon described the parenting pressures: “Yeah, it used to drive me crazy. Anytime I walked out the door: ‘Take your brother with you.’ No, no he cannot be with me, running with me at that age.” These internal and external demands were on top of the demands that were expected of the adolescent at that time during development. All participants alluded to feeling an external pressure from society that the adolescent was not good enough⁵ to keep the parent out of prison. Turned on its side, participants also described an external pressure of carrying the burden of the parent’s actions. Destiny described the pressure she felt from her mother that was indicative of these two pressures:

You know, yeah, you know, I want to be like, you know, look like him and all the good stuff, but then I would go home to my mom and reality [would] kind of smack me in the face. She’s, no, you are not going to be like your father. Yeah, you may smile like him but no, that, um, your brain, that it’s you’re smart like him.

⁵ The use of “good enough” is in reference to Winnicott’s (1965) term in relation to good enough mothering. The term is used in relation to the child or adolescent’s behavior and the sense that he or she did not behave well enough to prevent his or her parent from being incarcerated.

Concept #2: Stigma

All participants reported that they felt stigma and shame in connection to the experience of having an incarcerated parent. Most participants felt they were being judged for their parent's actions. Aliyah described the feeling of being judged for her mother's actions when they found out she was imprisoned:

It was, okay, my mom is away, what did she do? Then you get the like, oh, are you crazy too? I used to get, you know, and they used to be a little joke like whenever we were growing up, but um, yeah. It was nothing like, you cannot really disclose that, and it was not really easy to talk about, because it was like, I mean, people say yeah, my parent murdered somebody.

Participants felt that their subsequent parent acknowledged the incarcerated parent but did not want the participant to turn out like them. Participants expressed an internal experience of stigma, shame, and embarrassment that they felt because of the parent they had. Some participants had no way to reconcile these feelings. Aliyah shared these feelings in her interview:

But again I was ashamed so I would just say, my mom is not dead, but she does not live with me. So I mean, I just never even said where she was for a long time too. You know. 'Cause I mean, people say, why are you, okay your mom is in prison, what did she do? And then it is like you really do not want to, you know, have to say that, and it gets awkward. And um, I just did not want to experience that a lot and deal with it 'cause I was already ashamed.

Due to societal stigma, many participants tried to keep the experience secret and tell very few people. A few participants described how the stigma and external messages influenced their desire to be good so as to show society that they were different than their parents. Xavior described how he did not feel stigmatized or shame in connection to his parent because his parent had served as a parental figure for a handful of his friends:

Well, I would not talk to, well, teachers I would not bring my personal issue, but friends, I was like, yeah. They like, they pretty much they knew what was going on. Like, I was able, you know. My father was a male figure for, you know, for my friends sometimes too and man, but it was not like um, they knew they had their fathers, but it was like, man, they knew my, I would not share, I was not, like, going through anything emotionally, so it's, like, it would not show.

This created an environment and opportunity for these teenage boys to connect with each other on the mutually shared loss.

Concept #3: Trauma

The participant stories pointed to the fact that for some participants the experience of having an incarcerated parent was traumatic. Trinity put it succinctly: “Yeah, she was like, kids remember EVERYTHING!” Other participant stories indicated that only some parts of the experience were experienced as traumatic. Almost all participants’ stories shared snapshots of memories that were described with the words “I remember it like it was yesterday...” Participants indicated that their sense of time of the experience seemed to slow down and even bend. Some participants were transported back in time while describing their memories and even felt the emotion as if it were happening to them in the

moment. Trinity shared a memory about a present that she received growing up: “And I did not care about her taking anything away – nothing bothered me but that red wagon.”

Jeremiah shared the pain and trauma he felt the day his father died:

We looked out the window and seen our dad fall because he was getting high and then he was coming from across the street [to] the house. And, from the lady’s house. And he made it to the bus stop and that’s when he just fell.

Concept #4: Grief and Mourning

As stated before, some participants alluded to the fact that having a parent die might have been an easier experience than having an incarcerated parent. Participants connected this kind of statement to how society misunderstands their experience. Each participant described the experience of having an incarcerated parent as a loss. Aliyah described what she felt was lost: “It felt like, you know, you get to hug all night and be with her, and it felt like she was taken away.” Some losses were bigger than others because the participant was closer to that parent over the subsequent parent or due to the situation surrounding the parent’s incarceration. Participants described how they came to understand and mourn the loss of the incarcerated parent, as well as the life they had before the parent’s incarceration. It became apparent through participant stories that many of the participants went through multiple losses. Jeremiah shared his experience of his parent gone on top of the cumulative losses he already experienced:

He [referring to his father] died when I was fitting to be eleven. He died [in] January and I was fitting to turn eleven. So. When that happened, I am thinking the whole family fitting to fall apart, everybody fitting to, just, momma fitting to

put us out and us, we stayed together, me and my brother. My sister and them, they wanted to be with my granny. They thought they had a little leeway. My mom, she was strict. So that is what happened. They were not really in the picture as far as being around all the time.

Some participants had to mourn the loss of the family unit and accept how the family splintered. Other participants had experienced prior losses and the parent going to prison exacerbated prior loss and trauma. All of these factors, as well as the type of connection and communication the participants had with the incarcerated parents and subsequent parents, impacted the mourning process.

Concept #5: Imagination

Many of the participants used imagination as a way to handle the experience of having an incarcerated parent. The participant narratives indicated that there were at least five distinct uses of imagination: defensive, developmental, used as hope, used as a form of play, and the road less traveled. Participants used imagination in a defensive way as a way to psychologically survive, such as having fantasies that one was one of the siblings in the television comedy show *The Cosby Show*. Other participants used this form of imagination as a way to get away from difficult conversations with others or to pretend that different members of one's family were one's parents. Aliyah explained that the fantasy of being adopted by another family was life-giving compared to what her day-to-day life was like without her incarcerated parent. Aliyah's fantasy provided a connection that was not felt in reality, even though she knew that the reality of foster care was much worse than her reality. Aliyah described how she used her imagination:

I guess it was just one of those final, you know, opening up, and because I never said anything all those years 'cause I was scared and was like, I did not want to be placed in a foster home or something, like, even though I wanted to be adopted and, like, taken away by a good family, I did not, that was just a thought as a child. I rather be living somewhere else than here, but then in reality you really do not want to...you know, be put in the system and taken away and, you know, split up. I did not want, you know, that happening. So for all those years, I never said anything because of that.

Imagination was also seen as developmental. Participants described their goals and dreams for themselves through the use of imagination. A couple of participants described fantasies about being an athletic superstar but at some point realized that was not an obtainable goal and changed course. Other participants used imagination as a way to explore something before doing it in real life. Vernon described his future in this way:

I think that I want to do, probably, like, be like a RN or something, or just a nurse, or, but I just like, I am scared of doing the actual time to be in there. I know it is going to take, like 3 or 4, um, I think it [can] take 3 years to be a nurse, like, a registered nurse. I know some programs you can do to be a nursing assistant and stuff like that, but I want the actual, to be an actual registered nurse. So you know, it is the time you got to put in and stuff like that. It is just, I want to get really situated, when I do it, you know, I want to at least be, have me a job and be going to school so I can be saving up.

Participants talked about their hopes and dreams through the use of imagination. Many participants described their hopes and dreams for the study and the researcher in this way. Many talked about the incarcerated parent in this way. Participants described their hopes for what their parent might have learned while in prison and how they would interact with the participant after being released from prison.

Participants used imagination as a form of playing with ideas. This form of imagination was used to describe what they wanted to be when they grew up. This form of imagination did not account for the impact of having their parent in prison. Destiny shared how she used her imagination when she was a teenager:

I remember um, me and my brother and my cousin, we were sitting in the house playing video games and um, NBA something, it was probably NBA Jam at the time for Sega Genesis, and um, yeah, so what do you want to do when you grow up? And he was like yeah; I am going to play in the NBA. I am like yeah man, I want to be in the NBA too, I want to play ball. He is like yeah, you can come and play ball, why not? I want to but the NBA won't let me in.

Participants used this form of imagination to wish for good things to happen for not only the incarcerated parent, but also themselves, as an outcome of the experience. Participants used imagination to help them breakdown their hopes and dreams into manageable pieces.

Participants used their imagination to talk about the road less traveled. Aliyah used this form of imagination to think about what it would have been like if the family had decided to move when they chose not to:

You [reference to her mother] played a big part in this 'cause we had gone to Arizona, we would have been in Arizona. And we never came back; we would have been in Arizona. So...I always think about how my life would have been if we had stayed in Arizona and if we had stayed with her best friend. And I am like, I am pretty sure I would have been better off.

Thereby imagining what life would have been like if the parent never went to prison. Participants used this form of imagination to think about how the parent would have parented the adolescent in the past as well as what it would be like in the future.

Concept #6: Need, Desire, and Yearning

Participant narratives indicated that the participants had desires and yearnings to be normal like everyone else around them. Trinity shared how she would like to have normalcy: "Yeah. So I mean, I would love to one day see him, but I prefer to see him out, like free, but..." Thus, having an incarcerated parent made participants feel different. Their stories also indicated that they needed to be parented from both parents, the subsequent parent and the incarcerated parent. There was an unspoken desire for the incarcerated parent to be a better parent both while he or she was in prison and if he or she were released. Xavior described this desire perfectly:

Yeah, it is like, it is out of my hands, and it is like, you know, like, I feel you can only push the person as much as you can push them. It is, you know, if that's not their desire, then that is not their desire.

For participants whose same-sex parent was incarcerated there was a deep yearning during the adolescent years to have that parent home for guidance, to ask them questions, and to learn from them how to be a man or a woman. These participants felt as if they missed out on something. Jeremiah described what he felt he missed out on:

Up in the age now, like, man, I was like man, all these years we'd miss, I say we cannot get them back, but we can move on and try to make the best of it. Because you know now you thinking is way different from how it was back then.

Navigating teenage life without the same-sex parent was described as more confusing. All participants discussed how they were parented and which figures were important for them, both during the experience and in the present. Many participants looked for mentors, for sympathetic teachers, and in the church for compensatory figures⁶ who would help fill the void their subsequent parent could not fulfill. Aliyah described how hard it was not to have the same-sex parent:

But um, I think one of the biggest things was moving with a single father and not having a woman to guide me or you know, teach me certain things. You basically have to learn, you know, a lot on your own.

The compensatory figures that the participants indicated as being helpful during the present day consisted of friends, significant others, extended family members, and people from the church. When participants felt they were not getting something from their parent, they tried to find it in other ways from other people. These compensatory figures

⁶ The use of the term “compensatory figures” is in reference to the term Kohut (1984) uses, which he called “compensatory structures.” Compensatory structures are used to compensate for a defect within the self by the use of other relationships or things other than the parental relationship to meet needs (Kohut, 1984). Therefore, compensatory figures are used to explain the need for this kind of relationship.

are also important developmentally to adolescence, which is explored in depth in a later chapter.

Concept #7: Unanswered Questions

Participants described having many questions about the situation that ultimately landed their parent in prison. Each participant set out to find answers to their questions. For participants who were able to see and communicate with the incarcerated parent, they went straight to the source. Destiny described doing just that:

Um, okay as far as family-wise, dealing with the situation, I guess there were a few times here and there that I felt like, is it appropriate enough to ask or not, for me to ask it or not, but if I felt that way I just would not ask...And honestly, adults tend to forget kids are around.

When the incarcerated parent shared the truth, these participants did not feel that they needed to look elsewhere for answers. These participants then described their process of reacting to the information with the incarcerated and subsequent parents. Participants who did not see or communicate with their incarcerated parent or for whom the incarcerated parent did not tell them what happened also these participants described the search for answers. Trinity described the kind of questions she had for her father: "Do you think, do you think about me? Do you imagine how I look? How I turned out?" These participants went to other family members for answers in the hope of understanding what happened. Some participants reported that they overheard answers to their questions and did not actually ask people, since the other adults in the participant's life would just talk about it. Trinity overheard information about her parents this way:

“But some things they just could not hide because I was a curious kid...and I would, like, listen all the time and if I would hear my mother’s name, my ears were extra open.”

Some participants shared that they actually asked family members about who their mother or father was and why they ended up in prison. Some participants got answers from family members because it felt easier and safer, especially when the incarcerated parent was felt to be too fragile or vulnerable. Some participants reported having unanswered questions to this day. Trinity described her desire for answers:

I have little issues with my mother, you know, um, I got a lot of unanswered questions that, a lot of questions that, questions that I want to ask her, but I know that I would never ask her because if I ask her...Um, ‘cause she is my mom, and I think she owes me a lot of answers. Questions to a lot of answers. Um, I think with me that maybe things with her, that maybe she thinks that I am not ready for...I do not really know.

These participants truly desire to know more about their parents because unanswered questions felt burdensome to them. Not having answers makes it feel as though the experience cannot be processed and put behind them. Trinity described being terrified of the answers, because what if that meant opening up “Pandora’s Box”? She worried that all her hard work towards understanding the experience would be in vain if she opened “Pandora’s Box.” Trinity felt a bind between her desire to have the answers and her fear of the unknown.

Concept #8: Trust

Throughout the participant narratives, whether or not the participants stated it, trust was a huge issue that got stirred up when the parent went to prison. A parent going to prison breaks the social more of parents always being there for their child. Almost all of the participants that had communication with his or her incarcerated parent talked about how trust was rebuilt. Aliyah said it succinctly: “But ‘cause once you lose trust with someone, I think, um, that’s another reason why it is easy for me to lose touch. If I feel like I cannot trust you, I do not need to talk to you.” The participants experienced the parent’s act of leaving the participant and becoming incarcerated as a break in trust. Participants described how the relationship with the subsequent parent impacted the participant’s ability to not only trust the subsequent parent, but also trust the incarcerated parent. Subsequent parents truly wield power in this arena. Participants who had a subsequent parent who tolerated and allowed the participant to have a relationship with the incarcerated parent had more communication with and were able to rebuild a relationship with the incarcerated parent while the parent was in prison. Communication with the incarcerated parent was the most important aspect of participant narratives in rebuilding trust. This communication allowed for the real story to come out, for trust to be rebuilt and worked on while the parent was in prison, and for the truth to come out. Jeremiah described this process between himself and his brother: “So they all build a bond and go, because communication be the number one key for all that. If you cannot sit and talk to him and tell him what you been through, it really do not work.” The participants stated that rebuilding of trust and communication while the parent was in prison helped create a stronger relationship for when the parent was released from prison.

Even if the participant and parent did not have a superb relationship before the incarceration, things could change if the parent was willing to change and to communicate truthfully with the participant.

Concept #9: Truth

Participant narratives focused on the importance of truth in relation to the incarcerated parent. Almost all participants described searching for it. Truth was connected to getting answers for the participants. Therefore getting truthful information was important to participants. Xavior described getting the truth from his father:

He was open about it. I just wanted to know what happened in there, but...yep...No, he talked about, I know he had talked about what straight up, like, what landed him, what happened in jail up until he got out of jail.

All participants searched for the truth during their teenage years. Most of them were able to find it, and those that did not still desired answers. As previously stated, the truth came from either the incarcerated parent or from other family members. Trinity shared that since she could not get the truth from her mother, she got it from other family members:

The family – I always listened, especially when my two aunties would come over and they would all sit at the table, I knew I always listened. I could be in the other part of the house. But I always knew that when Rosanne and Susan came, it was something about my mom.

Truth was important to the participant's sense of identity, in their ability to trust the parent and others, and influenced the desire to have a relationship with the incarcerated parent. Many participants found the truth but for those that did not, their stories indicated that they were left with more questions, ambivalence about the parent, and wondering about what it all meant for their identity.

This chapter encapsulates the emotional experience of having an incarcerated parent. As the reader can see, the emotional experience is complex and intertwined with many internal experiences, such as desire, loss, and trauma along with external pressures and aspects of the incarcerated parent's absence. Participant narratives indicate just how interconnected the emotional experience is to the relationships with parents and the participant's future.

Chapter VII

Horizon #3: Social Influence of Parental Incarceration

Another aspect of the participant experience of parental incarceration was the social experience. Participant narratives indicated the people that played instrumental roles in their experience. This section is broken down into the following concepts: who is gets told and who can be told, the role of friendship, the role of family, “doing you,” and the need to share. This section explored how participants dealt with the crossroads between social relationships and the experience of having an incarcerated parent.

Concept #1: Who Gets Told and Who Can Be Told

Many participants reported that when the parent was first incarcerated, they were either told explicitly to not share or felt as if they could not tell others that their parent was in prison. Aliyah shared that she was explicitly told not to share: “And then my grandfather finally came and told us. But I do remember, like, do not talk about it, do not tell any one. ‘Cause I got in trouble for telling someone.” Therefore, it seemed safe to talk about it within the family, but talking about it outside of the family would invite problems. Aliyah shared further what happened when she did tell someone:

I think I told someone, like, the same day or something, you know, ‘cause I mean, people noticed, and ah, I remember being in the hallway and I told someone, and I

think one of my sisters told on me, that I said something. And it was like, do not do that again. Do not, do not, do not tell anyone. It is private. So that really stuck with me for a long time. Years. And um, I really did not talk about it. A lot. I never really talked about it. So it started with that. With finding out and being told not to tell anyone.

Participants expressed feeling a sense of secrecy, shame, and stigma attached to the experience that created isolation and feelings of loneliness. At the time of the interview, Aliyah shared what it was like to keep it inside her: “Cause I guess from a young age I was...I was embarrassed and ashamed that happened.” Some participants ultimately shared their experience with therapists, friends, and even strangers, but that sharing did not come until later in their lives, except for those participants who saw therapists as a child or teenager. Jeremiah shared how he felt it was better to talk than to keep it in:

And that is what I do, I normally go speak to somebody or, you know, or I set up at Bible studies at the church, tell them the situation and what is going on and the majority of people say we are just pray on the situation, you know, do something to keep my mind focused. And that is normally what I do, that is how I get through my day, you know, routine, it is speaking to others about it, especially the youth, ‘cause now you know there is not a lot of leaders out there, and a lot of people, little kids getting locked up or killed for no reason.

Almost every participant described a sense of being different and feeling lonely when holding this secret that other people did not know or understand. Participants described a common theme in adolescence, of the desire to be similar to one’s peers. Destiny stated that she could not tell her friends while she was an adolescent, so she found other ways to

handle it: “I am a writer as well, so like, that was my ventilation. If [there was] something that I could not talk to my mom about or my friends about, [I would] write it down, talk to God, go to sleep.” Some participants even noted that, not to wish bad on their incarcerated parent, but it would have been easier if he or she had died and instead of having gone to prison. Aliyah highlighted this feeling that death would have been more acceptable:

So I would...it just seem like you want to think it was not real, or you wake up and she is back. It is kind of like, even though she is not dead, it is not to the same extent, but she is not with you every day.

Furthermore, it is more socially acceptable to have a parent die than to have a parent incarcerated. It is pertinent to highlight that there are prescribed ways in which people interact with a person when a parent dies, whereas this that is not the case when a parent is incarcerated. Participants described this experience as being a disenfranchised experience.

Concept #2: Role of Friendship

Participants expressed the importance of friendship in relation to their experience in adolescence, as well as in the present day. The study’s participants had different experiences with friendship and its role during adolescence. Some participants talked about how it was acceptable for them to talk about having an incarcerated parent, since that parent had also served as a parental figure for some of the participant’s friends. Destiny described having two sets of friends, one that was accepting of her experience and the other set that was not accepting. However, many participants felt as if they could

not tell their friends or receive support from them at first. Some participants described the first tentative steps of sharing their experience with a good friend who was ultimately accepting and supportive. Jeremiah shared how he tested the waters with peers when sharing the news:

In the way I first started out, I was saying, you know, when he was locked up and I see how his friends did, I was saying, um, if I was in the situation, how would I get treated? And what would my friends do to me? So that is why I was like, man, I got to pick me some strong around people that I know I am around, that I asked them, man, um, if something ever happened to you and you is in the situation my brother was in, what would you do? What would you want me to do? And you know, some of them be like, man, I'd [be] hoping you would be there for me, you know, look out for my family, or if one of them had kids or whatever, make sure my kid is okay and stuff like that. I would be sitting there like okay, yeah, this he is considered to be a true friend, and as time goes on I see if he changed up. But from right now, what he is showing me, I say I could hang with him. Because that is all you normally would look for out of a friend, that is saying that they would [be] your friend.

The participants described their ability to be vulnerable enough with others to receive support and a sense of togetherness that was vital for getting through the experience. Both Jeremiah and Destiny described the utility of their experiences in their adult lives by sharing them with the youth of today in an effort to change the world and continue on with their lives. Jeremiah shared what he says to the youth: "Well, you know, um, I used to do the little, ah, um, I speak to the youths, on the after school and tell them the side,

the stuff that is going on in jail and what they should do.” Almost all of the participants expressed that the experience of having an incarcerated parent helped them understand that some people will not change. This drove home the lesson that the only person they can change is himself or herself. Participants stated that if they could go back to adolescence with the knowledge they currently have, they would pick better friends. Every participant touched on how influential friends are and how he or she would choose friends now differently from in their past. Destiny described how she came to the realization:

You know, that is the problem. I learned that, like I said while I was in. Start, stop taking everything so personal; you can be close to someone without being close to them. Being selective with who your real friends are compared to who your associates are.

Concept #3: Role of the Family

The role of the family and the roles each family member fulfilled were described as changing when the parent went to prison. Each participant described having to take care of others and themselves in a different way after their parent went to prison. For some, this meant that they had to take care of their younger siblings or their subsequent parent, since the subsequent parent was overwhelmed by the loss of the incarcerated parent. Vernon described how he and his mother fought over parenting duties:

Me, I just saw it that, you know, you it is just me and my little brother, and you putting everything on me and you know how that is, you just putting all this responsibility on me and it do not, you know, that just did not work for me at 15.

Like every time I walked out of the house, I do not have to take him with me, I do not have to take him outside with me and stuff like that.

At some point each participant realized he or she had been placing others' needs above their own and had to start taking care of themselves. Participants described this realization as important because they also acknowledged that one could get lost in the mess of it all.

As family roles changed, so did parenting for both the incarcerated parent and the subsequent parent. The participant narratives indicated that four different scenarios occurred: the adolescent parenting the incarcerated parent, the incarcerated parent parenting the adolescent, the subsequent parent not parenting the adolescent, and the subsequent parent parenting the adolescent. In relation to the adolescent parenting the incarcerated parent, there was a strong desire that came through all the participant narratives that the parents should learn something from being in prison. Some participants described a bind that they felt because they wanted to parent the parent, but felt like they could not since the participant was a teenager and the parent was older than them. Xavior expressed this view:

Yeah, what to do, like, you know, you see him and it is like, of course I do not want him to go back to jail, but at the same [time] like, I cannot keep, I can make, I am in high school, going to school so...I am not really sure. I cannot tell you, oh Dad, do not take this outside, oh Dad, you know, you are grown and I am the teenager growing up.

Part of parenting the parent was described as teaching the parent how to be a parent since the incarcerated parent has time for such things while in prison. Another aspect of the

adolescent parenting the parent has to do with an external pressure the adolescent felt to keep the parent in good spirits while in prison. Part of this pressure included the feeling that he or she might not see the parent again if the parent were not in good spirits. Some participants discussed their desires to receive parenting from their previously incarcerated parents. These participants shared the disappointment that they felt when their desire to be parented and the parent's abilities did not match. These participants alluded to the fact that there were unspoken expectations they placed on the parent, which led to their disappointment. Trinity, whose previously incarcerated mother was out of prison, discussed the ambivalence she felt towards having her mother back. The experience was mixed with joy that her mother was home and with the burden that her mother created for her by being home.

Participant stories reflected his or her parent's (incarcerated and subsequent) ability to parent. Participants who had parents that parented acknowledged that their parents made sacrifices for them and they felt lucky. Participants reported that when the incarcerated parent and subsequent parents parented, the incarcerated parent took responsibility for their actions. This responsibility allowed the participants to have their own reaction and that both parents to accept their reaction. This acceptance allowed for trust and a relationship to be rebuilt between the incarcerated parent and the participant. This kind of parenting helped the participants build support networks and connections to services such as therapy, if such services were needed. Xavior described feeling that his family made the sacrifices so he did not have to: "Nah, I definitely did not have to stand on anyone besides my family. Besides my family and friends, they pretty much kept me grounded through my high school years when my father was gone, absent of my father." However,

when the subsequent parent was able to parent but made the incarcerated parent out to be a villain, the participants described this as a different kind of experience. When the incarcerated parent was made out to be a villain, the message participants received was that they would not benefit from having them in their life. Nonetheless, the participants who were in this situation described a desire to know the parent and understand them in relation to themselves.

A few participants described the experience of having a subsequent parent not parenting. These participants expressed anger and ambivalence not only towards the incarcerated parent, but also towards the subsequent parent, because they were left to process the experience alone. Vernon's statement highlighted this fact:

I really got [a] lot of stuff out of that. When I really realized that, like, you know, I just got to do me. I cannot depend on another person to take care of me how I can take care of myself. And that is just what it was.

These participants expressed feelings of isolation and resentment of the roles placed on them because the subsequent parent abdicated his or her parenting duties.

Concept #4: "Doing You"

All participants shared coming to the conclusion of having to put themselves first at some point. This experience creates tension that takes a person in many directions, such that if one does not "do you," one will get lost. Trinity put it succinctly: "Anyone in this situation has three options: to live around it, come to terms with it, or go crazy." What this statement conveys is how overwhelming the experience can be and how a person tries to adapt to the experience. Participants indicated that this experience could

take over one's life if one allowed it to. In an effort to take back control and deal with it, all the participants, at some point, made a conscious choice to focus on themselves.

Jeremiah stated it was a difficult choice but a necessary one so he could adapt:

You know, I was, um, I had went to [where] I was [going to] block my brother, like I was saying, um, it is because of him that that I am going through what I am going through. So I had to stop talking to him every day. I was trying to do that, but then I was saying man, I am neglecting him, and I am feeling wrong for doing that, but eventually I came around to where I was not talking to him as much. I was trying to get myself back together because I was always, I was still in the mind frame of depending on him of being there, instead of trying it for myself and see what I can do for myself while he is not around. And eventually that is when I stepped up and started doing, that things started opening up.

By putting themselves first, they could better support the incarcerated parent when visiting the prison. The participants felt that their actions had to have some meaning for them and not just for the parent. Jeremiah put it succinctly: "So I am cutting my life short as far as giving me opportunities to do what I want to do while I am here."

Concept #5: The Need to Share

Participants discussed how difficult it was to share their experience with others during adolescence. There was a desire to share the experience, but for one reason or another they kept it in. Participants shared that once they were able to talk about it, they felt better. Jeremiah described how he does not hold it in and talks about it:

Well, you know, like, I um, I normally like, go to little meetings and be talking to people, talking to guidance counselors or old employers that I used to work for, you know, I keep in touch with them and be talking to them and stuff like that.

You know, it is a lot of people that came into my life since the incident happened that, you know, I, sometimes I will call them on certain days and we will just talk, you know, iron out what's been going on since the last time we talked and, you know, work our way through it, or he may have problems that some occurred and asked me my opinion on it. And we go like that till kind of basically [we] get the situation resolved. Get a clear head or [a] better understanding of what we just went through.

All participants shared that they were hesitant to share with their families that they were participating in the study. Participants described their desires to share and to keep the interview process to themselves until the interviews were finished. It seemed as if they did not want family members to taint the experience. Participants shared at the end of the interviews that they enjoyed the experience and for some of them it was the first time they had talked about the experience in this way. Xavier fell into this group of participants:

I would just be more of, I would say, it was maybe [it's] not hard to talk, but I feel like maybe it is a chance to be expressing how I felt about, you know, the situation...there were kind [of], I actually never really talked to someone about this situation, like, you know, maybe joking around here and there, but actually sit down and review and record and like, [that's] something new.

Participants expressed a sense of pride and wonder that another person was interested enough in them and their story to just sit there and let them tell their story. It seemed as if the whole interviewing experience was precious and sacred to the participants and they did not want outsiders to ruin the experience, as family members can do from time to time for various reasons. Aliyah expressed that she was surprised at herself for not having shared the experience yet: “I am still surprised that I have not told anyone in my family. That I have done this [study].”

This chapter highlights the importance of social relationships during this experience. The experience of having an incarcerated parent is highly influenced by the ability to have different kinds of social relationships. This chapter gives the reader a glimpse into the other pressures such as stigma and family roles that affect the need to share the experience. Participant narratives indicated how this phenomenon could be experienced as isolating and disorganizing depending on who was there for them when they went through the experience.

Chapter VIII

Horizon #4: Spiritual Influence of Parental Incarceration

Faith and church played important roles for believers during the experience of having an incarcerated parent. Participants talked about their faith as a way to organize their experience. Participants further defined the use and role of God and the Bible in their daily lives and what it meant for them individually. Not all participants belonged to an organized religion. There was no one religion to which the majority of the participants belonged.

Concept #1: Faith as an Organizer

From the participant narratives, faith was used as an organizer of the experience. The participants who engaged in a faith system described it as a way to stay connected with a group of people when this experience was very isolating. Destiny described not being alone because of her faith: “For me, because of the way I was raised with my mom like, very spiritual, I have faith...I know that even when I feel physically alone I am still not alone.” Faith was used as a method of making sense of and understanding the experience. Faith gave guidance and rules to follow that seemed to naturally fit with the participant’s desire to be a good girl or boy in comparison to his or her incarcerated parent. Xavier stated that faith was important to him: “It was already there. Yeah, it was a

support system that was already there. I grew up from grammar school through high school throughout the church.” Participants indicated that when they were going through hard times they prayed. Prayer was comforting, as was the belief that someone heard their prayers. Destiny described her experience of prayer: “So personally for me, I mean, I have grown at it and matured in it now, but I just pray about it and just occupy my mind with something else.”

Concept #2: Role of God

Some participants specifically brought up the role of God and how he was a helpful figure. These participants felt that God gave them strength. Trinity described what she believes God gave her: “You have a choice, you know, right and wrong. You have common sense. God gave us all of us the wits to know better and to do better.” Believers felt as though he was watching over them and not giving them anything they could not handle. It was felt that God works in mysterious ways and teaches all of us different lessons. Destiny felt comfort from this kind of thinking, in which God looks after people:

You know, outside of putting God first, who is going to tell you whatever he needs to tell you to benefit you? Like, he’s not going to tell you something to benefit the next man, or whatever he is telling you to do or leading you to do, I am sure it’s to benefit you.

Concept #3: Role of the Bible

Some participants brought up the role of the Bible in his or her life. Participants shared that the Bible helped provide tangible strength to them through certain passages

and psalms. Xavier shared that he is one of those people: “Ah, um, what do I do to take care of myself now? Um, maybe just sometimes I take long walks, um, read the Bible...I just read. I just read the book of Psalms.” The Bible taught participants lessons, helped them make sense of both their incarcerated parent’s actions and their own, and gave them hope. The hope came in the form of outcomes of individuals in the Bible. Within these lessons, participants held on to the guidelines and rules set out in the stories. Trinity described what she would do if she were to visit her incarcerated father: “And if [I visit] every day I would have to have my Bible, I would have to be reading it. I...would talk to people, somebody that actually been through it.” This text provided comfort to the participants.

This chapter impresses upon the reader the role of religion and faith in the lives of those who believe. The experience of having an incarcerated parent can be destabilizing, and religion and spirituality can bring organization to the experience. Participant narratives indicated that faith and religion seemed to be space where relationships and connections could grow that helped them with their experience.

Chapter IX

Horizon #5: Practical Aspects of the Experience

Participant narratives helped draw a clearer picture of the many real-world factors that influence the participant's lives when a parent is incarcerated during one's adolescence. The following concepts are aspects of the participant's experience that are impacted by real-world pressures when a parent is in prison: caregivers, living arrangements, multiple losses, the parent becoming a barrier, communication, visiting the prison, internal reaction to system pressure, and childhood innocence.

Concept #1: Caregivers

Participant narratives described that after a parent became incarcerated, participants had different caregivers. For some participants, there was stability in the home and the subsequent parent was the caregiver for the adolescent. This stability was Destiny's experience compared to her half siblings: "I am the only one whose mom was stable. She had her own family support." Other participant narratives indicated that the home life was less stable and the adolescent had more than one caregiver, which turned out to be grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Trinity shared her experience of a variety of family members taking care of her:

Yeah, and then, you know, my two aunties, they would come and get me 'cause they was like young women, and one auntie had just got married and the other one was dating. And my auntie Rosanne and Susan, one thing that I can say, when they like left and got married and all this, and I was still a little girl with my grandmother. 'Cause when my grandmother raised me, I was in the house with all of them. And my aunties were more like my big sisters.

For some participants, he or she got bounced around to different caregivers. Aliyah was one of many participants who were bounced around:

My grandfather stepped in and he was the one taking care [of] us and taking us to visit her in jail. And um, he was the one that was there; my father was not really in the picture around this time but he [was] later. He is the one who raised me, you know...going forward. But at this time, he ah, it was mostly my grandfather and my sisters. It was only us.

This bouncing around between family members impacted the participant's ability to create an attachment and relationship to any one caregiver.

Concept #2: Living Arrangements

Participants described their physical living arrangements as part of their experience. For some participants, the act of the parent going to prison initiated a series of moves. For other participants, the loss of the incarcerated parent's income financially impacted the subsequent parent's ability to keep the home. Jeremiah described the changes that occurred in his life:

Aw, we have been, um, my mom and I; we have been tight, real close. We had built a stronger bond, you know, through all [the] little ins and outs. You know, we had times where during the process we lost the apartment. We had to stay in a car. We had a car that was not running. We had to stay in there for a whole year. Yeah. Like, I would go to sleep, my mom would watch me, and then I will stay up and she will go to sleep. It was the process. We had like my granny and them house, auntie's house to go to, but my momma vowed that when she moved from my grandmother's house she would never go to somebody's house and stay. You know, if it was not her own. And then as time was going on we saved up to where we moved into a hotel. We were paying monthly rent there until our place came and got ready. And then, that is how we always had a tight bond between my mom and I.

Participants talked about having to move to a different home and sometimes a different neighborhood to be able to afford housing. Participants described their living conditions on a continuum from where some subsequent parents struggled to provide running water, to a more stable home where the parent was able to provide the necessities but still lived in poverty. Aliyah described her experience as the following:

Um, like, the whole living with my dad, and how we were not living in the best conditions, and we were not really, we struggled a lot. You know, with even like basic necessities. There were times where we did not even have heat or running water. So that was um, that was pretty hard growing up with, and most of my winters we did not have heat on, we had little space heaters, and so if you left the room, you were going to be cold. Yeah. Washing dishes in cold water or like

boiling the water in the microwave or boiling it on a hot plate. You know, and just um, yeah. So it was, it's like, ah, I did not want to think about her either.

Some participants described having to worry about gang activity and shootings in the neighborhoods where they lived.

Concept #3: Multiple Losses

Participant narratives unearthed the experience that these participants went through multiple losses. The experience of having an incarcerated parent is not just about one loss but about many losses. Participants described the breaking up of their families, where siblings were split up and lived with different relatives or with their biological parents. Jeremiah expressed the many losses he and his family faced after his brother was incarcerated:

We had to, like, you know, we were so used to being in a big place. One time we had to move into [a] one-bedroom, and um, a lot of adjustments went on, like we had to break the family: the sisters went to my grandmother's, and me and my mom stayed together, so you know, like, we would only see the other side of the family if something special happened or a break came from school so we could go out of town. And um, all our trips and stuff got cut short because now the money was getting shorter because, you know, you got to take care of someone locked up.

Other participants talked about the multiple moves and going to different schools. These participants lost their peer group and had to start all over in a new school with new

students and teachers who did not know them. Aliyah described what the moves were like:

I always wanted to be somewhere else. It just felt like everything was being taken away from me when I moved with him. The life I was used to. The people I was used to. You are nine years old, so...even my eighth-grade year, we moved to a different state. So...you know, my friends that I had just been with for the past four years and I am about to graduate, now I have to start all new, in this new city, like I see why my mom wanted to stay, to ah, let my sisters graduate instead of, we would have moved to a different state.

Some participants described familial deaths that occurred just before or right after a parent went to prison and how hard these losses were on top of having an incarcerated parent. Aliyah described the many losses she faced: “Cause my mom left me. My granddad died and my sisters, we got split up, and for a long time, like, I did not even have communication with my older sisters.”

Concept #4: Parents Become Barriers for the Adolescent

This finding was the most surprising. Some participants felt as though their incarcerated parents became barriers to the participant's wellbeing or success. For some participants, their parent's actions made the participant become vigilant because of the fear of retaliation for the murder of an individual. Some noted that because of who their parent was and who their family was, this impacted what neighborhoods the participants felt comfortable and safe to travel in. Xavior shared his experience in the different neighborhoods:

I would say growing up on the South Side is kind of like, you know, a different environment. There are areas you could not go in on the fact of who you are, who your father was, or who your people are, it's like some areas, like, I would still never go in, but there are some areas in high school I really was not going in because, like, you never know if a fight will kick out or someone [who] did not like you from the high school could be around in there, and you get into it with fighting and that's with other things, it's like you just have to adapt to your surroundings, I [was] pretty much like that.

Other participants talked about their incarcerated parent as a barrier in relation to money. When a parent is imprisoned, there is less money for the family to use to pay the bills and paying for living necessities. Jeremiah explained the drain on his family's financial resources, "I am like, man, he's taken away, you know, he has to send him money and do the phones: I said, man, he's taking away from the savings." Participants also described how expensive it was to have an incarcerated parent because they had to spend money on the special phone bill that is connected to the prison, as well as send money to the prisoner for their commissary. The participants who were able to visit their parent at the prison reported that these trips were not inexpensive. For some families these trips included a night's stay somewhere close to the prison since the prisons were so far from where the participants grew up. Jeremiah described the financial pressure succinctly: "Sending money, then you do the phones and stuff like that, and try to pay the bills. It takes a toll on you." Destiny highlighted the impact of having an incarcerated parent on her ability to pursue higher education: when a person has either an ex-felon or a

felon as a parent, one cannot put them on their Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) forms. Destiny described her struggle in pursuing higher education:

So I had a difficult time proving that he was my father as far as school documents to be able to get financial aid. And I had to use my mom, so when they checked her income, they said she [her mother] makes too much money 'cause she files taxes with my stepdad.

Concept #5: Communication with the Prisoner

The participants talked about communication with his or her incarcerated parent. For participants that had communication with their incarcerated parent, it was in three forms: mail, phone calls, and visits. The participants that had communication with their parent expressed how important this communication was for them. Jeremiah expressed the importance of communication: “Yeah. That’s how phone calls helped and the visits helped, because if we did not have none of that, and we was just writing, aw...I would [have given] up a long time ago.” It seemed to provide comfort to know that the incarcerated parent was okay. Jeremiah discussed how he used the different forms of communication: “When he call, you know, I jot down some of the little stuff that he say he been through and all that, and I elaborate on it and send him a letter and tell him how I feel about it.” All the participants that had communication with their incarcerated parent described times when the prison went on lockdown. This experience was hard for them because no one could call, send mail, or visit the prison. Jeremiah described what the prison does during a lockdown:

They will even stop the mail, they will hold the mail, you know, they say that is a federal offense, but the county do not care. They will break the rules, they will hold your mail, and now people think you gave up on them, even though the entire time you have been writing, so you know, when I heard that it really shook me up.

This lockdown procedure was especially hard when a participant heard that their incarcerated parent had been hurt and was in the medical ward.

Concept #6: Process of Visiting Prison

Most Illinois prisons are located at the far ends of the state, which made it hard for participants to visit their incarcerated parents regularly. Jeremiah described the distance to the prisons:

Way down there. So if you are not riding, you got to go on the Internet or whatever or tell him to send you the information where that bus come. And they be having buses that meet up right at like 95th [Street] and then everybody get on there and they will drive you down there for a certain fee.

For participants who made the trip, participants shared how demeaning and dehumanizing the visitation process was, since it included strip searches and racist prison guards. All of these things made it more painful to visit the parent in prison. Participants reported that these demeaning processes made them feel as if they were being punished for the incarcerated parent's actions. Jeremiah described the process:

Right, you know, to go, to go visit him, it would be the rough part, starting because you know you have to go through the strip searching, pat downs, and all

this, it's like you are getting your privacy violated. You got a man telling you to squat and do all of this, take your clothes off, then when you go see him.

Trinity described her understanding of her neighbor's trips:

I mean, you got, I have a girlfriend, her son is somewhere downstate and she was not a girlfriend but like a neighbor, like an older lady. And she used to go on these trips like every three months to go see her son, but it was, like, a process. It was like a van that would go to these different penitentiaries. Drop them off and pick them up... Then bring them back to the city and the [red] line for them, for, you know, but she did not get home 'til two or three o'clock in the morning. And she would leave at like four in the morning.

Participants described how the visits were conducted. The hardest part for the participants was when visits with the incarcerated parent were conducted in a crowded room where there was a glass barrier between the prisoner and the visitor. These visits were conducted via telephone or through a hole in the glass. Participants described how one could not hug the parent in this situation, which made it difficult because they deeply desired to do so. Destiny described the differences in her visits with her father:

The first few years you could not touch or anything like that, it was like the mouthpiece, you had to talk through... Yeah, like a hole... Yeah, you still had the glass, yeah, and then after he was in there for probably like eight or nine years, you know, you can sit with them, talk, you know, interact, touch, all that stuff, hug, all that, but only for like a couple hours a day.

At lower security prisons, the participants described the visiting process as being conducted at a table, where people could sit and talk with their incarcerated parent and

were able to give and receive hugs. However, participants reported that leaving the parent was the hardest part of the visitation process.

Concept #7: Internal Reaction to System Pressures

All participants described an internal reaction to some pressure that came from outside of them. Participants described feeling as though they were in a disadvantaged position in relation to the rest of the system. Police were described to have all the power and the participants felt powerless. Some participants described the police as being unethical and not following the law when interrogating the incarcerated parent. In a similar vein, the criminal justice system was described in the same way. Participants described the incredible power that the system had in relation to their own sense of power since one judge or twelve jurors could make a decision about their parent that had an enormous impact on their lives. Jeremiah described these feelings and how he felt the system was against his family:

So when the appellate court ruled in his favor to give him a case, now the courthouse, they hesitant about wanting to touch the case. Because they find them guilty a lot of them moved on like, you know, the polices, they got rankings, moved up, and um, the state's attorney's the moved, some turned to be judges some be lawyers, stuff like that. They know for all the time he was gone, they have to pay him.

The participants felt as if they were not taken into consideration during the decision-making process. Other participants brought up how the education system also seems to be

against them. As stated above, it is hard for this population to obtain funds that would allow the participants to be able to receive higher education. Destiny described how she felt the system tricked her:

I finished my first year of college, found out the scholarship I had was not going to pay for everything...I, basically I was duped into going to the school. I was heated and I still had to figure out a way to pay for it, so I was like, all right, I know of a way I can pay for it. I am pretty good at it anyway. So I just went full force in it. It was like, I want [to] do this all summer, and by the time the semester starts again, I'll be good. And I almost made it.

The system was described as almost being built to keep people down. Destiny described having paid a fine that the state is claiming she has not:

Any little itty-bitty thing. They just took my state tax of \$54 for a ticket that is already paid for under a bankruptcy. They know I am not going to fight for \$54; it is going to cost me more to fight for it.

Some participants described either their own probation officers or their parent's probation officers as unhelpful. Aliyah thought the probation officer would help her parent and herself more than he or she actually did. Aliyah described the probation officer's lack of help as a big factor in how she and her mother failed to communicate after her mother was released from prison. Aliyah described how she felt the system failed her and her mother: "So it's like you give them this mediocre information, but it is not really anything that's really, that you can really utilize that much." She felt as if the prison system did not prepare her for what to expect once her mother was released and what issues they could face.

Concept #8: Childhood Innocence

Participants noted that, compared to other families and families that were portrayed on television, they were missing something. This “something” ended up being a childhood innocence that most of the participants stated they never experienced. Trinity hit on a feeling that others also felt in relation to television shows:

With the momma, the daddy, ‘cause I grew up looking at Bill Cosby [and] the Brady Bunch, I wanted, I wanted that as a kid, or if I, other people that went to school with or wherever...and they had their father pick them up and their mother pick them up, that’s what I missed. ‘Cause I never really knew exactly how it would have been]; I had a grandmother and grandfather.

Although they did not describe it as losing their childhood innocence, this was implied in their description of their neighborhoods. All the participants in the study live on the South Side of Chicago. Some participants grew up on the West Side, but all ended up in different neighborhoods on the South Side. Xavier said this about the differences in the neighborhoods:

I would not say it is more heavy to the point it’s you just know well, growing up on the South Side, I would not say a person like come from up north and would not know, okay, this seems like a neighborhood and a person is outside for like, um, I am going over there and living, but it was not, if I move up north, I am using the word “up north” ‘cause, like, meaning outside of west and down south is looked like oh, and up north is more quiet and nicer compared to down south, it’s more like where shit happens, so...

This chapter highlights aspects of life that change or are dealt with when a parent becomes incarcerated. Participants described aspects of their real-world lives that were influenced by things not readily seen at first glance. The chapter also highlights the participants' connection to forces larger than themselves and how they interact with them.

Chapter X

Horizon #6: External Environmental Aspects of the Experience

The preceding chapters discussed the participants' internal experiences and reactions to having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence. This chapter describes the environmental factors that the participants described as having a real influence on their experience. The following aspects – impacts of poverty, the impact of the incarcerated parent, schooling, mistrust of “medical” authorities, intraracial support, and use of the researcher – were described by all participants to have real external pressure on the internal experience of the phenomenon. Participant narratives indicated that the rest of the world tends to forget about and falsely attribute to the participant these external factors, therefore pathologizing an environmental issue.

Concept #1: Impacts of Poverty

It is important to mention the real and tangible environmental influence of the study. What is meant by “environmental influence” is the impact of poverty, which many of the participants lived in during adolescence. Participants talked about having to move many times due to not having enough money to pay for rent. Other participants talked about living in subsidized housing projects around the city. Some participants talked about the worry of where one's next meal would be coming from and the potential for not

having enough food in the home for their family. Aliyah described how hard it was to live on and sometimes below the poverty line:

Um, like, the whole living with my dad and how we were not living in the best conditions, and we were not really, we struggled a lot. You know, with even like basic necessities. There were times where we did not even have heat or running water. So that was um, that was pretty hard growing up with and most of my winters we did not have heat on, we had little space heaters and so if you left the room, you were going to be cold. Yeah. Washing dishes in cold water or like boiling the water in the microwave or boiling it on a hot plate.

Many participants talked about growing up in neighborhoods where they had to worry about shootings, gang violence, retaliation, or getting jumped. Vernon described some of what he has seen:

‘Cause we have been like, to be honest, we done and did stuff like, we done been shot at together like, we done, we have lost guys who done seen like every like people we done been with every day who used to be in our circle, we all lost guys that been, that we seen every day, that we used to go get every day and kick it with and see every day. We done and lost, like our guy got killed in front of us, like we done seen this [with] our own eyes.

Participants also touched on how they watched their subsequent parents work long hours to make ends meet. Jeremiah expressed how difficult it was for him and his mother:

And then now you was like depending on people, like, okay, say if my mom was going to visit him, and I could not make it because I had school or something, now we got to get somebody come watch me. While she be able to go do that. Or

if it was money, money was short and the bill was coming up, we had to try half of the bill and then be able to send him some, or put some money on the phone, and then you know, it was okay at the beginning because his so-called friends used to send a little money to the house, and we will send it to him. They helped out. Once that slacked off and did not happen, now we look at it and say it's all on what we going to do and cannot worry about nobody else. That is why I mean when I say it got hard because the little help fell off, but now we struggling trying to make ends meet and then help him out at the same time.

If the incarcerated parent returned home while the participant was still living there, it was often hard for the previously incarcerated parent to find a job. Participants also talked about their current situation and, for some of them, how hard it is to find a job and/or be on welfare. All participants talked about their education in the public school system and how difficult it was for some of them to stay in school.

Concept #2: Impact of the Incarcerated Parent

As stated before in other sections, a real impact of having an incarcerated parent is having less income in the household than before. Participants alluded to not only losing the parent's income, but also having to further split the income they had in order to pay for things both outside of and within the prison. Some participants and their families had to make sacrifices, such as which bills to pay, to be able to send some money to the incarcerated parent. Therefore, there was less money for participants to be able to do after-school activities, participate in sports, or play instruments. Aliyah described what it was like to not be able to play a sport even though she wanted to:

But I would have actually, should have gotten more involved, 'cause at least a sport. I did not; I was not really in anything in high school. I did not participate, first two years and I ah, did not participate in anything. I did not. And I was ah, another reason why I could not get home because it was not the public transportation was not the same as here in Chicago.

Concept #3: Schooling

Most if not all of the participants went to public school in Chicago. Participants also described school as a place where participants faced stigma or gangs. Destiny described what it was like to go to a public high school where her experience would not be accepted:

At least, you know, started, and yeah, I guess kind of growing up becoming myself, so I just kind of blanked that part out. Like, I guess I went to School K, so, I mean, that was not necessarily cool, going to that school. Like, you know, other areas or other high schools or whatever, it would be cool if your dad was a hood dude, he was the man, but at School K, it was about smarts and, you know, that was a cool kid at School K, so...

Some participants described the different caliber of some of the schools they attended. The participants described their school's ability to help them get through classes or obtain extra support, but also described the school's lack of understanding of one's experience of having an incarcerated parent. Some participants stated that their teachers did not know they had an incarcerated parent. Other participants described how their acting out in high school was taken at face value and the participant got in trouble

without the school understanding where their behavior was coming from. Vernon's experience was just that:

And it was like, I do not know, it was just yeah, I was too comfortable. I knew everybody and did what I wanted to, it was like I told you, couldn't nobody tell me what to do, so you know, I was smoking, I come to school high, and stuff like that: leave out of school, fights in school, all types of stuff. And you know, it just led up to me getting kicked out, but I say my school experience, it was decent, it was like, you know, it was a good school experience for me, only how I went two years. I, you know, I still know everybody who I went to school with, you know, I still talk to everybody I went to school with, you know, no just because I did not graduate with them. I still got my GED, I still going to school, so, you know, I am not really tripping.

Concept #4: Mistrust of "Medical" Authorities

All participants at the end of their interviews talked about their interview experience. Some participants alluded to initially worrying about and mistrusting the researcher due to the systematic atrocities that have been done to the African-American population. Jeremiah expressed his initial worry was about the study:

I am like man, um, she might, have I ever talked to her before? Because when you said that I am like I want, I was saying at first, I am opening up and I read it, I am like, has she ever like, she had somebody in her life that was locked up or been through there, where she had to go back for visiting a friend or family locked up? Because I am like man, that be um, that would be deep, for a lot of people to just

to breathe it and be in it and try to actually try to call you and say I want to be talk about it. Some people are like aw, man, they are just trying to use some old scientific stuff to get in our heads, you know and stuff. That is why a lot of people do not want to go and express and let it out.

The researcher's openness, willingness to listen, and withholding judgment allowed for this worry to disappear for the participants. The participants felt as though the researcher was interested in them and not trying to change or manipulate them in any way.

Concept #5: Intra-racial Support

Destiny brought up an interesting theme that happens in the African-American community: community members sometimes do not support each other. The competition for jobs is so high, because there are so few jobs, that resentment and jealousy can lead African-Americans to not supporting each other and even committing crimes on each other in attempting to feed one's family. Destiny described this phenomenon, which she feels is very real:

But on the flip side, you got those people who are like, well, they should not do that and they could do other things, well, it is kind of hard if you got one job and ten people fighting for that one. And one person gets the job. The other nine people got to try to figure out a way. Somebody is getting robbed, somebody is getting jacked. I feel for that one person who has the job. They better move out of the neighborhood. And that is pretty much how it has kind of happened over the

years. So. You know, the, I understand, I just, I am kind of in the middle. You know.

This concept seems to have an important connection to poverty that should be explored more in an effort to create a more successful approach to eliminating poverty.

Concept #6: Use of the Researcher

Each participant used the researcher in his or her own way. The researcher seemed to hold some importance to the participants since she was willing to listen to their story and be a holder of it. Many participants described at the end of the interviews that they were initially skeptical of the study but wanted to participate. When asked what they were skeptical about, participants shared that they feared being judged or being told their experience was incorrect. Participants reported that this fear disappeared quickly during the first interview when they got a sense that the researcher was truly interested in them, was interested in their story, and was not pushing some agenda. Jeremiah shared his initial skepticism and how it changed:

Well you know, I, at first I was like um, and this is the honest, do not take it wrong, I was like um, aw man, she is one of them old lawyer students that got everything and she just want to look down and get into it, you know the middle class, and say well, how do you live, your life experience and the person being locked up. And who is to say um, you do not want to follow his footsteps and go and be locked up with him. You know, just trying to get the insights so you can say well you know, them guys there, they have been locked up, it just, they just throw their life away, they worth nothing. But as I got to talking, well, I say, wait,

I do not really feel that. From the first day I was like, I do not really feel that um, she is the type that try to go and misuse the information that you give.

Participants expressed hope that the study would help not only them but others as well. Jeremiah felt that the researcher would do just that:

She is the type that if she had the chance and really had the time to study it and sit with somebody, that she will really try [to] work and help iron out the situation what they be doing right, instead of thinking, you know, wrong is the best way to do it. You do wrong to just make it by in life, but that is not because you can do right and still live good in life.

Some participants felt as if the researcher was going to do great things with their stories and her degree. Jeremiah expressed his conviction that the researcher would be successful:

And that's a good thing and I am quite sure after you do a couple of them, you will get the grasp of it and be saying, you know, hey, a lot of people had a lot of negative stuff happen to them in life but they still made some positive things to still be strong enough for no one to talk about it, and still have a good sense of humor in mind to just think, you know, it's always good that can outweigh the bad.

There was a wish that the researcher would use their painful experience for something good in the world. Trinity reported at the end of the interview how she made the researcher into a family member:

I mean, it is um, you all went to school and study all of this, but it is no problem to me. I mean it is like I am like [with] my little cousin Melissa. It is like I am

talking to Melissa. She is 16 years old, but when I am with her, she asks me a lot of different questions. She is a teenager and I just like, just, I am putting you two like [together].

This chapter covers the external environmental influences that have real impacts on how each of the participants experienced the phenomenon. It acknowledges that the phenomenon of having an incarcerated parent is more frequent in lower socioeconomic strata as well as in minority groups. This chapter was informed by the parts of participants' lives that were felt to be out of their control but had a large influence on it. It seems important to acknowledge the environment and system in which participants and their families exist in as well as acknowledge the biases that are felt in that system. The chapter tries to account for the influences of poverty as to not misattribute them to the participants.

Chapter XI

Imaginative Variant #1: Psychodynamic Forces

The emotional experience of having an incarcerated parent is complex. The psychodynamic aspects of denial, deidealization, deidentification, emotions, coping, how one psychologically survives, and the sense of self are explored in this chapter. Participant narratives indicated that these aspects of the lived experience influenced how the phenomenon was experienced overall.

Concept #1: Denial, Deidealization, and Deidentification

All participants in an attempt to manage their lived experience of having a parent incarcerated used the following specific defenses: denial, deidealization, and deidentification. These three defenses were clearly present in all the participants' experiences and narratives. Participants described the use of denial during the beginning part of the experience when the parent was entangled in the criminal justice system but not yet convicted of a crime. Aliyah described her experience of waiting for her parent's verdict:

Um, all during the process it was still like she is going to be fine, she is going to come home. You know, the verdict would be in our favor. They're not going to

take away someone away from five, you know, kids, and um, leave us by ourselves.

Participants described the use of deidealization of his or her incarcerated parent. Xavier reported that his deidealization of his father started when he went to prison:

Yeah, what to do, like, you know, you see him and it is like of course I do not want him to go back to jail, but at the same [time] like, I cannot keep I can make, I am in high school going to school so...I am not really sure, I cannot tell you, oh Dad, do not take this outside, oh Dad, you know, you are grown and I am the teenager growing up.

Lastly, all participants described a deidentification process from the incarcerated parent. The deidentification process was described on a continuum where one end was minimal deidentification and the opposite end included massive deidentifications. Trinity described her massive deidentification process with her incarcerated mother:

Whenever I would go somewhere with my grandmother she would say, oh, this is Georgia's daughter. OH! That used to burn me up with my grandmother. I think that when I would tell my grandmother or get mad when she would say that I am Georgia's daughter.

Participants described the involvement of the incarcerated parent, the involvement of the subsequent parent, and messages that were communicated to the participant that influenced the participant's place on the deidentification continuum. Participants also expressed conscious choices to use the following defenses in an effort to hold themselves together through the experience: taking care of others, fantasy and daydreams,

distractions, humor, and minimization. Xavier indicated how humor helped him get through the experience:

Well yeah, like, it's always a good thing, you know, sometimes just joking about different things but like, you know, have to keep your ah humor, a good sense of humor throughout the situation. Otherwise you get real tired. It would not be a rough time but like, you know, we use it sometimes just to create jokes but it was not like a major...

Participant narratives also indicated that participants used a variety of unconscious defenses in an effort to stay cohesive as well: enactment, internalization, reaction formation, splitting, and disavowal. Vernon shared how he unknowingly enacted part of his father's story in an attempt to understand it. Vernon struggled with his own drug demons but was able to not end up like his father:

And they put me on outpatient, the outpatient program that you come in a couple of days a week or whatever, you know, and do drops, and I could not stop. And they gave me like ten chances. And I just never stopped until, you know, my probation officer told me it was, you know, time, it was one way or the other, and I thought he was playing. And it popped up on me one day like yah, you know, you got to go to rehab next week, and I was like, you know, I was stunned. It was devastating because I had like so many chances, like, really I did outpatient like nine times, I stopped, started, started again, and it kept giving me chances. And that last time, and then he told me like, you know, you got to go next week, and it was just like, what? Like, for real? You are really sending me? He was like, yeah,

you need to have all your stuff ready next week because if you not here, if you not up here, then the next day they come into your house to come get you...

Concept #2: Emotions

The next concept of the internal psychodynamic experience was emotions felt during the experience. Participants described an array of emotions felt in connection to the experience. They described a desire for the parent's presence and a yearning to be normal like their peers. Participants expressed fear, sadness, anger, helplessness, anxiety, loss, love, disappointment, and most surprising, feeling lucky. Xavier shared how he felt lucky:

Well, we knew he got, we knew he had to do three years straight across the board, so it was not, it was not to the point of us, react[ing]...we um, feel is not the word to the point that maybe it is kind of hard for at the beginning, you know, because we were not going to have cry...[our] dad but once it started getting to us like the last year he was about to get out, I went to my senior year and my sister was in her junior year, so it was pretty much we knew we was going to see him.

Although there was a myriad of emotions, a distinct pattern of emotions emerged from the participant narratives. Most if not all of the participants experienced the following emotions: disbelief/denial → confusion → fear/anxiety/worry → sadness → helplessness → anger → ambivalence → acceptance. Not all participants expressed acceptance of the experience. Some narratives indicated that a few participants were still stuck in ambivalence about the experience. The emotions described by participants were not experienced in a linear fashion. Aliyah made a statement that shows just how many

emotions can be felt at one time: “Cause it was too much going on. And then I, I never thought about it since I became an adult, but I am pretty sure like, I really blamed her for all that...first it went from loving and missing my mom.” The emotions were fluid, where participants went in and out of the emotions throughout the experience.

Concept #3: Coping

All the participants talked about how they coped with the experience. Different coping mechanisms were employed to help participants manage their emotional experience. All participants stated either overtly or through their narrative that taking an active stance is better than being weak where the experience simply happened to the person. Many participants indicated that talking about the experience to a nonjudgmental figure was one of the most helpful coping mechanisms. Jeremiah described how nonjudgmental figures were helpful for him:

I was, you know, getting into little sports activities, then I was um, talking more like, you know, I had um, with a counselor had me do a little events where we would have people sitting in groups and we would be talk out our fears and angers and problems and what was going through our heads and, you know, our dislikes and likes, and then once I started talking and speaking about it, I felt better then because, you know, somebody know my story, and then they can use that and probably input and take some of that and apply it to what they going through...

Trinity and Destiny indicated that writing and journaling were good ways to get things off their chests when they could not talk about the experience with others. Many participants described different distractions such as reading, listening to music, praying,

and illicit use of marijuana and alcohol as ways to handle the experience. Lastly, going to church and reading the Bible were described as helpful coping mechanisms used by the participants.

Concept #4: Psychological Survival

Participants described the many things they did to help them psychologically survive the experience. Participants identified things that allowed them to feel like part of an accepting community, figures they could go to for advice and support, and ways of interacting with people. Participants described academics and school as a place they felt alive. Many, if not all, of the participants described themselves as smart. Trinity used acting out as a method to engage others around her in an effort to keep her safe. Trinity shared one of the times she acted out: “If my grandmother told me to take out the garbage, I would actually take out the garbage, but I would not put it in the garbage can outside. I would take that garbage out and spread it around the back yard.” Other participants described how important their friendships were for getting through the experience. Friendships assured the participants they were not isolated. Although no participants self-identified as gang members, gang-like activities were shared when some participants described their adolescence. For one particular participant, gang-like activities with friends were important because this participant did not feel invested in at home. A few of the participants reported that they worked during their high school years. Work was not described in terms of the family’s financial state, but described for its function to the participants. Jeremiah described what working meant to him:

Yeah, I was doing it um; I was getting like four hours to do it after school at this Company X. I was doing it there. You know, after school, I get four hours in there and they let you come in on weekends if you wanted to. I was doing it and that is when I just said, okay it's me right here. Um, uh. Yep. So that's why I stay focused.

Working allowed these participants to have control over something in their life and engage with a new community of people. Jeremiah and Destiny also described playing an instrument or being part of a sports team. Like the other activities, this type of activity allowed the participants to feel connected to others, as well as to have a coach or teacher to look up to in the absence of other figures. Most of these things that the participants used to psychologically survive also helped physically keep the participants safe and off the streets.

Concept #5: Self

Participant narratives indicated that they thought about themselves in relation to the huge influence of their incarcerated parent. How the participants kept a sense of themselves is discussed in a findings chapter; this section is about the verbalized worry that each of the participants had about themselves and what it meant to be connected to a parent who was incarcerated. This worry seemed to be expressed in the choices the participants made to be different than their parents. Trinity described that she does not understand nor does she want to be remembered for the badness: "I do not understand that with people. They remember the negative of a person more than the good." Many participants expressed that they thought of themselves as smart, good, and doing well in

school; however, they had to contend with others and society connecting the badness of their parent's actions to them.

This chapter highlights one part of how the phenomenon was experienced by the participants. The participant narratives describe the thoughts, feelings, and actions that are connected to the understanding and survival of the phenomenon. This chapter helps the reader understand how disorienting this phenomenon can be and how it is internally experienced.

Chapter XII

Imaginative Variant #2: Assumptions about Parents

Participant narratives highlighted many social and assumptions about parents that are affected by a parent going to prison. These assumptions and how they change influence the psychological experience of this phenomenon. The following ten assumptions were found important by distilling participant narratives: every child wants to love and be loved by their parents; every child wants to keep a connection with his or her parents/child will make necessary adjustments to accommodate parent/each child wants to be good enough; child's desire for parenting from parent; desire for a "normal" family; an "essential other" is important to this process; truth is essential; desire to master/understand the experience; this experience was traumatic for some participants; stigma is real; and active is better than weak. These assumptions are important for the social work field and for social service agencies to keep in mind when conceptualizing the experience and working with this population.

Assumption #1: Every Child Wants to Love and Be Loved by Their Parents

Each participant desired connection and love from his or her parent, from both the incarcerated and subsequent parent. Not only did the participants want these things, but they also wanted to show their parent these things as well. For the participants that visited

the parent in prison, they described the willingness to go through the dehumanizing visitation process in the name of love. Participants wanted to be able to give the parent love and receive love and connection from them. These participants in an effort to show love offered up metabolized lessons, Bible passages, and conversation. Their narratives show participants had hope the parent would learn their lesson and not return to prison. Many of the participants that were able to visit their incarcerated parents described just how much it meant to be able to hug and physically touch their parent. Not being able to physically show the incarcerated parent love was difficult for the participants. This simple act of love and affection, although small, communicates the love and affection one needs. Visits with a parent at a prison facility with this kind of visitation policy were more pleasant for participants. Therefore, the larger criminal justice system has a big influence in one's feeling loved by the incarcerated parent.

Participants who were not able to visit the incarcerated parent in prison were left with questions about whether the incarcerated parent really loved them. These participants described how much they loved their parent, but felt as if they could neither show it nor feel it. Therefore, the absence of the incarcerated parent spoke volumes about their unmet emotional needs. Participants were left feeling as though it was their fault that the parent did not love them enough to engage in this way. Trinity described how she has had no contact with her incarcerated father but wanted to know about him. Her narrative and experience was colored by this void felt from the lack of love. To this day she is left with questions such as, Does he think of me? Does he love me? These kinds of questions were present in the narratives of other participants who did not have

communication or visitations with the incarcerated parent during their adolescence. This experience called into question the participant's sense of feeling lovable by others.

The desire to love the parent and be loved by the parent applied to the subsequent parents as well. Any child wants to be loved and feel loved by his or her parents, including whoever takes over the parenting responsibilities after a parent is incarcerated. These participants had the same desire. Aliyah described being able to feel connected and loved through education with her subsequent parent. Her subsequent parent struggled to be a parent in other ways due to the economic pressures of being a single parent. However, he knew how to connect with his children through educational activities. Aliyah described how she felt loved and connected when her father engaged her with books and different school projects. Therefore, being able to find common ground where she felt her father could interact with her allowed her to feel love and attention that she did not feel in other interactions. Destiny described how during a part of her late adolescence and early adulthood, she knew that her subsequent parent, her mother, would not accept her lifestyle. Therefore, during this time of her life, Destiny cut off communication to her mother and only contacted her when absolutely necessary in order to keep her mother's love. This allowed her to continue to feel loved by the internalized parent. Ultimately, Destiny and her mother reconciled and have a closer relationship for it.

Thus, the moral of this assumption is that when one feels love and feels able to receive and give it, one feels connected to others. This connection will be explored below; however, connection is important for psychological reasons. When one feels

loved and admired, one feels invested in and safe, which allows one to then focus on other things, such as learning and interacting with the outside world.

Assumption #2: Every Child Wants to Keep a Connection with His or Her Parents/Child Will Make Necessary Adjustments to Accommodate Parent/Each Child Wants to Be Good and Good Enough

In a similar vein to the first assumption, children and adolescents want to keep a connection to their parents. To keep a connection with the parent, whether incarcerated or subsequent, the adolescent will try to make adjustments to accommodate the parent. Lastly, each adolescent wants to be both good and good enough in relation to the parent. Each participant noted some aspect of the incarcerated parent that he or she identified with, most often the parent's intelligence. This connection to the parent's intelligence was often the only similarity. Thus, the adolescent was acknowledging the parent, but establishing their independence and differences from the parent. The participants who were able to communicate with and visit their incarcerated parents tried to teach the parent lessons. These lessons were shared to show how disappointed the participant was, as well as maintaining a connection with the parent. By trying to teach the parent, the participant was establishing agency and control over the situation, as if to say to the parent, "I need you to be a better parent to allow me to stay connected to you." Part of this teaching was driven by the fear of not seeing the incarcerated parent again because of recidivism. It is apparent that participants made adjustments to accommodate the parent in an effort to stay connected. These adjustments came in the form of changing behaviors, emotions, and even character structure.

The participants who did not visit their incarcerated parents in prison did share a desire to visit and communicate with them. When participants could not visit with their incarcerated parents, imagination was used to stay connected with the parent. Imagination allowed the participants to feel connected and loved and allowed the incarcerated parent to parent the participant, even if in real life the parent was not able to do so. Other participants used imagination to fantasize what subsequent parenting was like, since some subsequent parents either struggled with parenting or did not parent.

One of the most interesting findings from the participant narratives was the fact that all participants expressed some sort of desire to be good and to be good enough for the incarcerated parent: that having a parent in prison drove them to be better behaved. This was easier for some participants and harder for other participants. For the participants who were better able to regulate their emotions and behaviors, they tried to behave as best they could, because that would allow them the most privileges outside the home. Other participants, who struggled to regulate their emotions, relied on acting out for attention. This acting out was in the service of placing external safeguards for these participants who could not do this themselves. Trinity in particular was so worried about turning out like her mother that she engaged with her subsequent parent in a way that forced her subsequent parent to punish and watch her closely. Trinity's acting out served to give her structure that she had not yet internalized and so could not do for herself. Vernon's narrative showed that he tried to teach his father in order to stay connected to him. However, he was not successful, since his incarcerated father was not willing to be taught or influenced. Therefore Vernon was forced to make an adjustment to stay connected to his father. Vernon ultimately cut his father out of his life in an effort to keep

his internal object and experience of him good, since his father was such a disappointment in real life.

As stated before, deidentification with the incarcerated parent occurs not only because of development, but also because of the experience. Deidentification from the incarcerated parent is tied with feelings of connection. In an effort to state that they are different from the incarcerated parent, the participants used their connection with their parents to define themselves. Although participants described physically and verbally deidentifying with the incarcerated parent, participants at the same time stayed connected to the parent through fantasy and internalized aspects of the incarcerated parent. Compensatory figures and subsequent parents also helped the participants stay connected to the incarcerated parent. This deidentification process was in service of helping the participants feel that they could be “good” and “good enough” by finding the good and positive in themselves.

Assumption #3: Child’s Desire for the Parenting from the Parent

Participant narratives unearthed the desire to be parented by both the incarcerated parent and the subsequent parent. Participants described that when a parent becomes incarcerated, the participants felt a void and were not whole. This void is experienced for various reasons. It was influenced partly by the speed of the arrest process when parental functions were rapidly ripped away from the participants, thus leaving the participants to manage functions that were once filled by the parent. Participants felt they had to grow up fast and learn to do things faster than they would have expected. Part of this early maturity had to do with development and having to internalize and incorporate regulating

one's self, emotions, and morals sooner than one's peers had to. Upon realizing this, participants described missing out on parenting, which they deeply desired from the parent. To make things harder for some participants, they had to take on parenting roles since the subsequent parent could not function. Therefore, these participants were pushed into becoming more independent and self-sufficient regardless of whether they were ready for it or not. These pseudo-independent participants expressed a strong desire to have a strong subsequent parent and described their experience as overwhelming because of all the demands placed on them. For the participants who had a functioning subsequent parent, external pressures did not influence their experience as extensively. These participants reported being able to do adolescent things. When the subsequent parent did not fulfill this parenting role, participants looked to others to fulfill it. All the participants described taking on a caretaking role in relation to parents and subsequent parents. Taking care of others was a mode of connection that kept the participant and whomever he or she was taking care of together. Caretaking was also used as a way to show the incarcerated parent, if he or she had communication with them, what he or she needed from them. Taking care of others was a way for the participants to feel admired and loved by both the subsequent parent and the incarcerated parent. Therefore, caretaking was a defense and a coping mechanism that allowed participants to fulfill their needs. Participants identified that by taking care of others, they were taking care of themselves. This feeling indicates the importance of parents parenting because the need will be fulfilled or defended against in some way.

For participants whose incarcerated parent was the same-sex parent, this fact added an extra layer of desire for the parent's presence. This parent was experienced as

especially important during adolescence because their absence was felt so strongly. These participants described feeling as if they were even more at a disadvantage and missing something. Compared to peers who had the same-sex parent at home, dealing with things such as puberty, interest in having intimate partners, and dating was hard to navigate without someone of the same sex to go to for advice and with questions. These participants described that finding a compensatory figure such as an aunt or a male pastor was important in helping them navigate adolescence. The compensatory figures helped the participants navigate their experiences as well as supporting and championing for them when needed. Compensatory figures were not only important to the participants who had a same-sex incarcerated parent, but for all participants. Adolescence is a time when the adolescent is separating himself or herself from the parent in order to find others in their lives that view the world in a similar way. Thus, mentoring from people other than one's parents is important to development. Compensatory figures and fantasies fill the void left by the incarcerated parent's absence. These aspects help fill yearnings, self-object functions such as love and admiration, and structure to be internalized.

Assumption #4: Desire for a “Normal” Family

Participants alluded to the desire to be “normal” and to have a “normal” family. What fueled the participants' desire was their past experience and what they had seen on television. Although family meant different things to each participant, it was nonetheless important to them. Most participants felt a void in the family when a parent went to prison. This loss influenced how participants viewed themselves and their families compared to others. The void in the family structure highlighted the decreased sense of

being loved, connected, and belonging. The intensity of the pain felt due to the void left in the family was influenced by the use of defenses. Many participants described the desire to be connected with someone so they were not alone in the experience. This sense of family and normality was achieved in different ways: defenses, other people, or imagination.

All participants described the influence of television shows on his or her desire to have a normal family. Participants described how television's portrayal of the family did not portray their reality of family. Television families were a reminder of what they wanted but could not have especially for families that were split up. Some participants shared that their family split up for monetary reasons after the parent went to prison. Other participants described not getting along with the subsequent parent and choosing to leave and live with an extended family member. Unfortunately, when a parent goes to prison, their absence heightens any tensions and previous dysfunctions present in the family. As the participants discussed the tension and stressors placed on the family after a parent goes to prison put families at greater risk to split up. For some participants, the sense of family did not change when the parent went to prison because the subsequent parent was able to parent and/or had experience with the parent not being present in the adolescent's life previously. Therefore, when the parent was incarcerated during the participant's adolescence, it was not as big of a change and psychological roles in the family did not have to change much or at all.

When the "normal" family could not be achieved realistically through using extended family members, participants found other ways to feel as though they had a family through making friends, pretending, and using their imagination. For participants

who felt as if their real family could not and would not provide them with the experience of a “normal” family, they looked to their friends group to provide the functions that a family normally provides, such as security, protection, love, and a feeling of belonging. By changing the concept of family, these participants got their needs met in a way that his or her real family could not. Extended family members or friends were important in rebuilding the sense of family that was torn apart by the parent going to prison.

Participants who had a somewhat marginally supportive family used pretending as a way to make the family whole. Trinity described how she claimed her aunt and uncle as her parents when asked about her parents by people who did not know her situation. Not only was pretending easier conversationally, but it also allowed her to feel as if she had a normal family, like the ones on television. Although this participant had a supportive family, her desire to pretend was influenced by the shame and stigma of having two incarcerated parents. Pretending was also a defense against painful feelings and the realization that with an incarcerated parent one feels a lack of love, security, and protection. Love, security, and protection are important to one’s sense of cohesiveness. For participants who did not have a large extended family, the use of imagination was employed. Imagination was used to feel loved and protected much like with pretending. Aliyah described her daydreams of being adopted by another loving family in which she felt loved by, connected to, and invested in by the parents. She understood that this daydream would never be realized, but it allowed her to feel connected psychologically in an otherwise disconnected and deserted reality.

Assumption #5: An Essential Other Is Important to this Process

An essential other⁷ is important when one has an incarcerated parent. This essential other is important not only to the experience of having an incarcerated parent, but also to the loss and the developmental process. What makes the essential other so important is the communication one has with this person. Being able to communicate with both the incarcerated parent and subsequent parent was important. If there was no communication with the incarcerated parent, the participant was left with many questions that subsequent parents and compensatory figures could not fully answer. Being left with questions influenced the participant's sense of self and identity. Part of adolescence is figuring out who you are in juxtaposition to your parents and what they stand for. Thus, when participants did not have much information about the incarcerated parent, it impacted their identity process.

Having an essential other is important to the adolescent development process. During separation and individuation from his or her parents in adolescence, the adolescent slowly through repeated separations, starts to internalize functions of regulating one's emotions, incorporating morals into one's sense of the world, and creating a sense of identity. During this time of development, the parent is used by the adolescent not only for parental functions, such as feeling loved and protected, but also as someone to bounce off of and define and individuate from over time. However, this developmental process is complicated for adolescents who have an incarcerated parent. For the individuals who have a functional subsequent parent, this slow individuation

⁷ The use of essential others is in reference to the concept and book by Galatzer-Levy and Cohler (1993) called *The Essential Other: A Developmental Psychology of the Self*. Other relationships besides parental ones are important to an individual's development, which is why the author uses the term (Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 1993).

process happens with this parent; however, for those who do not have a functional subsequent parent, this process looks different. All of the participants, whether they had a functional subsequent parent or not, described the search for other figures in his or her environment that could be used as compensatory figures. Compensatory figures were described as adults within the adolescent's environment that could help support the adolescent through the deidealization process of individuation. For the study's participants, these figures included coaches, teachers, bosses, extended family members, and friends. These compensatory figures helped to fulfill parental functions, as well as helping the adolescent internalize structures so that he or she could do the functions themselves.

The participants who seemed to fare better shared the following advantages: communication with both their incarcerated parent and the subsequent parent, having a functional subsequent parent or compensatory figure, and being able to visit the incarcerated parent. This contact and communication allowed for the truth to be told about the situation, as well as for trust to be built between all parties. When trust was built between people it allowed for both parties to feel safe and secure enough to disagree with each other with the knowledge that the other would still love and care for them even if they did not agree. When all of these things were present, it allowed for the adolescent to feel secure enough to ask hard questions, to face his or her emotions and reactions, to know he or she would get through his or her feelings, to feel supported enough to explore what this meant to him or her, and to face identity questions.

Assumption #6: Truth Is Essential

As alluded to previously, truth and trust are essential for psychological health. Through the participant narratives, it became apparent that when the parent became incarcerated, it broke the trust between the individual and his or her incarcerated parent. Trust influences the sense of security in one's life, as well as trusting that the parent will not lie or act in the same negative ways during or after prison. Trust needed to be rebuilt. Trust in the subsequent parent and his or her ability to parent was also important, since it functioned as a bridge or base from which the participant could begin to establish trust with the incarcerated parent. Therefore, the subsequent parent's relationship with the incarcerated parent had a major influence on the participant's experience of the incarcerated parent. If the subsequent parent was open to and able to help the participant in having a relationship with the incarcerated parent, it was then up to the incarcerated parent to build back the trust. For the participants who were able to do this, their narratives indicated that the incarcerated parent accepted the parenting role and continued to do so; that the prisoner was willing to be influenced by his or her adolescent; that he or she was willing to tell the truth and allow the participant to have his or her own reactions; that he or she had communication with the participants; and that he or she followed through on small things from prison that helped build trust back in them. Visits, discussions, and allowing the participant to have their reaction without it being judged enabled trust to be slowly repaired naturally.

This trust helped the participants find out the truth, which was important to them. Truth was important because participants wanted answers to understand why the parent ended up in prison. Many participants also wanted to know the truth because it impacted

how they viewed themselves, as well as what it meant to their identity. Parents are used to understand one's self and in the creation of one's identity. Participants described looking for truth during their adolescent years, and for those who still had questions, they were still looking for them as adults. For the participants who were able to find answers, trust was slowly rebuilt through the process explained earlier. This process allowed these participants more psychological freedom where they were able to work through their emotions and ambivalence about their parent and allowed them to be less driven by defenses and more driven by their own desires. For the participants who did not find answers, they ended up being driven by their defenses and emotions connected to the experience. Their ambivalence and unanswered questions continue to cast shadows of doubt on the self, their identity, and on the incarcerated parent's ability to be truthful. Aliyah desperately wanted a relationship with her formerly incarcerated mother, but still has questions about the experience that her mother is not willing to answer. This lack of communication has influenced their current relationship, which she considered rocky. Trinity expressed that she would love to ask her formerly incarcerated mother and currently incarcerated father questions. However, internally she is terrified of the meaning of the answers to her sense of self and identity, which are delicate and vulnerable. For Vernon, whose father did not want to answer any questions nor parent because of his own issues, he was left with unanswered questions that were disavowed. He pretended not to care whether he got answers even though he felt the opposite. This lack of trust in the incarcerated parent was seen to have an effect on the participant's ability to trust that others would stick around and give the participants what they needed.

Thus, truth is important not only for rebuilding the relationship with the incarcerated parent and others, but also for many other things. With the truth, there can be no secrets about the situation and between parent and teenager. Truth is needed for development to continue without getting derailed. Truth helps build connection not only with the incarcerated parent, but also with other individuals in one's life. Lastly, truth is needed to help the participants make sense of the experience internally. Making internal sense includes internalizing the loss, which helps the developmental process of deidealization and deidentification continue, therefore allowing psychological development to continue. Truth is also vitally important in understanding one's self and identity. For those who did not find the truth, it impacted their identity and sense of agency in life.

Assumption #7: Desire to Master/Understand the Experience

Participant narratives showed a desire to understand and master the experience of having a parent incarcerated. The manner in which the participants mastered the experience was influenced by the participant's ability to visit and have a relationship with the incarcerated parent. Therefore the participants who were able to see their parent employed different strategies compared to those who were not. Interestingly, participant's tangents off of interview questions gave context to the felt experience that was projected onto the world in an attempt to understand it.

Participants who were able to visit the incarcerated parent mastered the experience through conversations with the incarcerated parent. These conversations allowed the truth to be uncovered and for trust to be rebuilt. These participants also

described discussions with extended family members that helped them incorporate and understand why things happened the way they did. These participants' incarcerated parents were also willing to be influenced by the participants' need to teach the parent lessons they learned from the experience in an effort to better him or her. These participants had extra support outside their families, such as support groups, the church community, and/or a therapist. The truth and the support they gained from their immediate family and the community allowed for the participants to make sense of their own experience and master it so they could continue to move forward in their lives.

Participants who were not able to see their incarcerated parents made sense of their experience in a different way. These participants had to rely on extended family members' thoughts, feelings, and accounts of what happened in their attempt to understand the parent's actions. Aliyah relied on books and music to master her emotional experience, since both of her parents struggled to help her process the experience. Music gave Aliyah an outlet and a way to identify some of her emotions, such as anger and sadness. Listening to others express their angst, anger, and sadness allowed her to identify and express these emotions. Trinity used television crime shows in an attempt to understand her parents' minds. She was particularly interested in understanding what made a person think he or she could get away with a crime. She also wondered about evil and if committing crimes indicated the evilness inside a person. This indicated that she did not think people could be both good and bad at the same time. It was clear that participants who were so defended against the experience unconsciously enacted some aspects of the situation in an attempt to understand it. Vernon described not having many adults in his life who followed up on what they said. So, when he got in

trouble and a particular adult stated that he had a choice of jail or rehabilitation, he did not believe that either would happen. He was surprised when the probation officer showed up and told him to pack his things for rehabilitation. Vernon's incarcerated father had been given chances like these plenty of times but never took them. Therefore, it is not surprising that Vernon enacted part of his father's story in an attempt to understand it, as well as to get help from others.

The participants' tangents when examined individually did not make sense; however, when taken all together, it was clear that the tangents represented an attempt by the participants to describe how dehumanizing the experience was for themselves and their incarcerated parents. Stories of ghosts, zombies, and traitors shared common characteristics that were indicative of the experience. Each character in the tangents went through a transformation from something positive to negative. Participant narratives shared this same quality in connection to the entirety of the experience, as well as to their incarcerated parent. Another aspect of the tangents highlighted how the relationship to the incarcerated parent (or tangent figure) had changed. Participants described feeling protected before the parent was incarcerated and reported that afterward they did not feel the same way.

Their protector was now the figure that scared them. The figures are symbols for what was lost when a parent becomes incarcerated. An additional characteristic of these three figures is that the figures haunt others. Much like the three ghosts of Christmas Eve in "A Christmas Carol," one figure stands for what the participant used to have, another for the experience away from the incarcerated parent, and the last figure stands for the uncertainty the future holds with the released parent. These tangents point to how

dehumanizing the whole experience was for all involved. The incarceration process denies the fact that incarcerated parents are human beings who have children. It also denies the fact that visitors to the prison are not the cause of the problem but are victims of the bigger problem as well.

Assumption #8: This Experience Was Traumatic for Some Participants

Although no one participant expressed that the entire experience was traumatic for him or her, this experience was described to have aspects that could be considered traumatic. Almost every participant mentioned that he or she had a memory from almost a decade ago that was experienced as if it happened the day before. Participants described one of the many aspects of trauma. In this particular instance, participants were describing how trauma bends time.

Trauma prevents integration of experiences, as detailed in specific memories that were shared with the researcher. As stated above, for integration participants needed to feel safe, protected, and a sense of trust with the person who was helping them create a narrative about the experience. This process happened naturally for the participants who had a subsequent parent who was attuned, who parented, and who allowed for contact with the incarcerated parent. These participants had better integration of their memories. Those who did not have an attuned subsequent parent had less integration of their experience and memories, had more compromised functioning and used the defenses of fantasy and pretending to stay cohesive.

Assumption #9: Stigma Is Real

Participant narratives indicated that individuals with an incarcerated parent feel and shame and face stigma. The narratives described that there are both internal and external pressures on individuals who have incarcerated parents when it comes to stigma. Society itself plays a role separate from other external pressures that are faced by the participants. Because of stigma, the participants felt secrecy was important.

The narratives indicated external pressures on the participants when it came to participant and incarcerated parent behaviors. Some participants described the pressure they felt from their subsequent parents or extended family with the explicit message of “You will not turn out like the incarcerated parent.” Therefore the implicit message internalized was, “I expect you to be different and behave better.” All the participants took in this message. Participants also described feeling as though they carried the burden of the incarcerated parent’s actions and described situations in which they were judged on their incarcerated parent’s actions and not their own. This experience casts a huge shadow over the participants’ lives. Participants fought to have others judge them for their own actions and not their parent’s actions.

Participants described their internal experience of shame. When shame lined up with other internal and external pressures, participants described a pressure to be different from their parent. Many participants described feeling isolated, ashamed, embarrassed, and alone in the experience. Stigma attacks the very connection to others that is so important for the participants to get through the process. Many of the participants described feeling as though they were not good enough to keep the parent out of prison. These feelings and stigma led participants to hide the experience through the use of

secrecy. Many participants expressed the need and desire for a relationship to their parent even if they were considered “bad.” Therefore, participants described a conflict that influenced their use of secrecy. This need for secrecy became internalized. The internalized secrecy defended against the feelings of shame that lowered one’s sense of self and self-esteem. The secrecy reinforced loneliness and disconnection because it prevented connection with others, so there was a permanent sense that one was different from others. The secrecy led to feeling ashamed of themselves and their heritage since one was powerless against one’s family and their actions. Most participants felt this way; however, Xavior shared that his immediate community was accepting and he felt no stigma, since many fathers were imprisoned in his community. His father had been a father figure for others in the community, so there was a built-in community he could relate to. However, he did not go around announcing that his parent was incarcerated, due to the stigma that still exists outside of his community.

Participants described society’s pressure on the experience. Many participants felt there was an unspoken pressure from society for children to have more agency and power over their parents than they actually do. Many participants felt they were also being punished for their incarcerated parent’s actions. Society engaged in magical thinking that the adolescent had the ability to make the parent behave better when in reality the adolescent had no such power. Society experiences helplessness in the face of the phenomenon and then projects it onto the families and children of the incarcerated parents. Society seems to be in a schizoid state in which everything is split into either good or bad. There is no room for integration of the two values where an individual can be both good and bad. This position then places pressure on and gives messages to the

families of incarcerated individuals that the parent is bad and that his or her children do not fall far from the tree. Society's laws do not leave room for ambivalence or grey areas, so the criminal justice system's judges end up being instruments of punishment rather than creating environments where rehabilitation can happen.

Assumption #10: Active Is Better Than Weak

One of the major implications that came out of participant narratives is the sense that active coping strategies are better than feeling weak. Being active in relation to the experience is a defensive movement against feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and having no control over aspects of the experience. It allowed participants to feel a sense of agency in relation to an experience where they did not have much agency to begin with. Jeremiah stated that when one has an incarcerated parent, "It is like two people [are] locked up: one person in prison and the other person [who] is free." This statement gets at how participants and the families of incarcerated individuals feel as if they are also imprisoned. By trying to take action, a person is trying to create connections and relationships that are so important for not feeling alone in the experience and are so life-giving. Many participants felt that not coping was being weak and meant that they were giving up not only on themselves, but also on the incarcerated parent. Giving up was felt as if it allows the experience to win and the individual loses. Being active fights against being engulfed by an overwhelming experience. Psychologically, being engulfed by the experience and being weak is psychologically experienced as annihilating the self and the individual. Therefore, those participants who partied, drank alcohol, and smoked marijuana as adolescents were all defending against the anxiety they felt from this

experience. These defensive maneuvers were used in attempts to escape the pain they felt and the void left by the parent. Compensatory figures and religion were employed to help the participants survive the anxiety and, at times, the lack of cohesion in their fragile selves. By engaging others, participants then could face the anxiety and start to understand and master it with the support, attunement, and protection that compensatory figures and subsequent parents can provide.

Jeremiah and Destiny described their altruism, which psychologically was an attempt to defend against their anger towards their incarcerated parents. These participants also talked about their true desire to teach and talk to youth about the experience to help others not follow in footsteps of their parents and to create a dialogue so people will feel safer and be more willing to talk about the topic. In relation to the incarcerated parent, taking an active role allowed the participants a sense of agency and the ability to share with the parent their thoughts and feelings in the hopes of making the parent a better person. Participants shared that the overall experience was overwhelming at times because of anger, disappointment, and sadness. Teaching their parents served to protect their own sense of self.

This chapter impresses upon the reader just how much of the participant's life is affected by having an incarcerated parent. The parental assumptions highlight different experiences and strategies that participants used to inform their understanding. Each parental assumption is important to remember when working with this population because it signifies the complex issues underneath it.

Chapter XIII

Textural-Structural Analysis of the Experience

Participant narratives indicated how the lived experience of having an incarcerated parent is influenced. There were three key variables that influenced the participant's adaptation to the incarcerated parent's absence. The first variable was the truth. Having the truth and full reality about what led to the incarceration was important for the participants to know and make sense of the experience. The second key variable was the kind of relationship participants had with the incarcerated parent, or if they had a relationship at all. Lastly, the third key variable was the availability of an attuned subsequent parent. How these three variables interacted with each other dictated how the overall experience was integrated and how the participants functioned.

Knowing the truth was important to understanding the gravity of the situation. When the incarcerated parent was open and honest about what landed them in prison, this honesty helped participant development. As stated elsewhere, participants whose incarcerated parents did not share the truth were left with questions. These questions undermined trust in the parent and in participant relationships. For participants who received the truth from the incarcerated parent, this helped foster trust in the parent and others that impacted processing and development. Participants who had incarcerated parents who shared the truth experienced a different environment than the incarcerated

parents who did not share the truth. Participants who obtained the truth from the incarcerated parent had the chance to ask follow-up questions. These questions and answers allowed the participant to have a sense of control or agency in their experience. Participants that knew the truth seemed better able to face other real-world challenges such as societal messages. On the other end of the spectrum, participants who were not told the truth were left with questions. Participants on this end of the spectrum of experiences were filled with mistrust, had questions about identity and one's goodness, and were left to fill in the holes in the story by themselves. Those who did not have information from the incarcerated parent ended up assuming the worst for no other reason than, why else would the parent not share the truth? This impacted trust in relationships to one's self, the incarcerated parent, the subsequent parent, and other people in the participant's life. Truth and trust impacted the level of organization of one's internal experience and one's experience of the world.

The relationship that participants had with their incarcerated parent influenced their lived experience and level of adaptation to the experience. Having a relationship with the incarcerated parent was important to many of the developmental processes at work at this stage of development. The incarcerated parent's ability to see the participant and have a real and unencumbered relationship influenced the kind of support that was given to the participant. The more insecure the relationship and the attachment to the incarcerated parent, the more anxiety and ambivalence influenced the emotional experience. The relationship with the incarcerated parent influences how the world is processed. When the incarcerated parent was willing to share the truth and be influenced by his or her relationship with the adolescent, there was more trust and security in the attachment to

the incarcerated parent. This kind of relationship fostered an environment that allowed the participants to understand themselves and their place in the world with more clarity. On the other end of the spectrum, when participants either had no relationship with the incarcerated parent or had an insecure relationship due to lack of truth or the incarcerated parent being unwilling to be influenced by their adolescent, they did not have the same kind of clarity as their counterparts. These adolescents experienced more anxiety and ambivalence in not only the relationship with their incarcerated parent, but all relationships. Participant descriptions of relationships in which the incarcerated parent was vilified were also experienced with more anxiety and ambivalence due to the stark contrasts between good and bad.

The kind of relationship the participants had with their subsequent parent influenced how other aspects of the lived experience of the phenomenon were experienced. The attunement of the subsequent parent had a major influence of how participants made sense of the experience. The participant narratives indicated that there were some very attuned parents who could help titrate the emotional experience without squashing the need or interest in a relationship with the incarcerated parent. On the other end of the spectrum, there were subsequent parents who did not help the participant at all with the titration of emotion or experience and the participant was left to handle everything by him- or herself. The presence of subsequent parents who were functional was vital to processing the experience and continuing development. Participant descriptions indicated that when an adolescent had a subsequent parent who was attuned to the adolescent's experience and helped him or her regulate and titrate the experience, he or she was better psychologically organized. On the other end of the spectrum, participant descriptions

indicated that a lack of parenting or dysfunctional subsequent parents increased the chances of psychological disorganization. The descriptions indicated these adolescents were left to process their emotions and the experience without anyone's help. Therefore their experiences were colored by overwhelming emotions like anger, sadness, and anxiety. These participants used more defenses in an effort to stay cohesive since they were left to manage their experience on their own.

As the reader has seen, each of these variables influence each other and are important in their own right. These variables have a variety of impacts depending on how they interact with each other. This interaction determines the level of adaptability for participants, which influences their ability to adapt in the larger world. The processing of the experience of loss and trauma are also influenced by these three variables. The integration or lack of integration of loss and trauma influences the level of adaptation to the world.

Chapter XIV

Findings and Implications

Five major findings emerged from the results and are presented below. These findings enlighten the lived experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence. The lived experience is a complex one since there are many processes in action during this developmental time period. Many of the processes overlap and influence each other. The concepts organized underneath each finding were important aspects of the experience of having an incarcerated parent. Theoretical implications of this phenomenon follow the findings. Each section will discuss the four major theoretical implications of the study. Every study has limitations. This study was no different. Following discussion of the limitations of the current study, six clinical implications will be discussed. Unfortunately, this phenomenon hits a certain socioeconomic population harder than others, which requires a discussion of social justice implications. Lastly, a discussion of future research will conclude the chapter.

Five Major Findings

Prior to delving into the major findings, it is important to highlight the essence of the study's findings, which is that relationships are important. As stated before, this phenomenon is experienced as a disruption and a rupture to the parental relationship.

How this population manages relationships and adapts to the world is different than other populations due to the developmental stage, period of time the parent is incarcerated, and the attunement of others around them. One can see how relationships have an enormous impact on an individual's life and trajectory since it impacts the realms of the developmental, emotional, social, spiritual, and adaptation to the greater world.

The first finding, *Developmental Impact of Parental Incarceration*, presents the impacts that were felt by the study's participants. The concepts that are covered in this section are vulnerability, coping, and having lingering questions. These concepts influence how the experience was processed.

The second finding, *Emotional Impact of Parental Incarceration*, presents the kind of emotions experienced by individuals living with this phenomenon. The concepts covered in this section are emotions, defenses, and abandonments. How emotions are felt and dealt with impacts individual development.

The third finding, *Social Impact of Parental Incarceration*, presents the importance of connection and relationships for individuals that experience this phenomenon. The concepts covered in this section are as follows: incarcerated parent, subsequent parent, same-sex parent, society, and essential others. Connection and the type of connection have a big impact on how a person traverses his or her development, as well as this experience.

The fourth finding, *Spiritual Impact of Parental Incarceration*, presents the importance of faith and religion to the overall experience of the phenomenon. Religion's place in the experience will be considered from many angles, including loss, trauma, and development. It is important to note that faith was considered as a coping mechanism in

the first finding. It was important to delineate the difference between faith used as a coping mechanism and faith and spirituality in relation to the whole experience.

The fifth finding, Levels of Adaptation, presents the aspects of the experience that influence the level of adaptation to the real world. Truth, relationship with the incarcerated parent, and relationship with subsequent parents are discussed in relation to stigma, society, and agency.

There are no sections on the practical or external environmental aspects of the phenomenon since they fall into the clinical and social justice implications. People work with individuals who have experienced this phenomenon should keep in mind the special considerations laid out in the clinical and social justice sections.

Four Theoretical Implications

The four theoretical sections will consider the following processes that occur during this phenomenon: loss, trauma, development, and attachment. All four of these processes influence and impact each other. Each section will discuss its own process and cover what kind of conditions create progression and derailment in each process.

The last section covers four important aspects of the study. Limitations of the current study will be discussed. A discussion of clinical and social justice implications will follow. These implications are important to keep in mind when working with this population. Finally, avenues for future research will be discussed.

This chapter ties together the many aspects of this phenomenon into one cohesive narrative, which is that relationships are important. The developmental, emotional, social, and spiritual impacts of parental incarceration, along with levels of adaptation build a

strong foundation for the theoretical discussion. This phenomenon includes the following processes that influence each other and how the phenomenon is experienced: loss, trauma, development, and attachment. The study's limitations, clinical and social justice implications have bearing on future research on this phenomenon.

Finding #1: Developmental impact of parental incarceration. here were three important parts of the developmental experience to explore: vulnerability, coping, and having lingering questions. Each of these features is explored more in depth to gain a clearer understanding of its influence on the internal experience of this phenomenon.

Vulnerability. The experience of having an incarcerated parent led the participants as adolescents to experience vulnerability, feeling different from others, and feeling a void inside them that they perceive other people did not have. Participant narratives indicated that some participants were aware of these feelings and others defended against them.

Jeremiah was one of those people who were aware:

I was in a vulnerable situation where I did not have that guidance or that protection any more. So now I have [to] step out there on my own and see what it was like. So that is how it was.

The defenses were in service of keeping the self cohesive, as well as remaining part of the peer group. The participants whose narratives indicated they were aware of their vulnerability had something the other group did not. The group that was aware of their own vulnerability had someone in their life like a functional subsequent parent or compensatory figure, had a stronger capacity to reflect on their experience, and learned from the experience. Interestingly, the participants who were more defended against feelings of vulnerability also perceived his or her incarcerated parent as vulnerable. This

perception of vulnerability in relation to the parent was highly influenced by outsiders. When the incarcerated parent was perceived to be vulnerable, the participant felt as if he or she had to defend against his or her own vulnerability either consciously or unconsciously because it was too threatening. Participant narratives indicated that this process happened unconsciously because the vulnerability and anxiety of being similar to the parent was too overwhelming and threatening for the psyche to handle. Defending against vulnerability was seen to impede the participant's capacity for reflection since the anxiety and connection to the parent was too threatening. To face this fear head on would have overwhelmed any participant's psyche. Participants described how the parent's actions created vulnerability in the real world because they had to be careful which neighborhoods they went into; otherwise they could face actual danger. Jeremiah had to face this danger head on:

Yeah. Because I am um fear now for my life, as far as what's the outcome from his [victim's] family or friends he had, the guy had that got killed. Is they going to try, you know, come back and get somebody close to him or something like that?

This danger created an extra burden that the participants had to carry. Therefore participants defended against anxiety to allow functioning on a day-to-day basis.

Vulnerability relates to psychological fragility. Some participants were predisposed to psychological fragileness because of family predispositions, trauma, or multiple losses. Abandonments, which influence a participant's sense of vulnerability, are explored later in this section. Aliyah held this worry, which influenced how she interacted with others:

I think I just felt like I only share what I wanted to share and really, if it was really like something deep and emotional, I probably did not share it 'cause I think I just always felt vulnerable so much that, you feel that on the inside, you do not really want to display that a lot.

Some participants expressed feeling like they were missing something that others had. Participants compared their experiences to those of the families portrayed in television shows. The sense of safety, security, and innocence seen on television was something they felt was missing in their experiences. Furthermore, their experience did not match what was portrayed on television, which increased feelings of isolation, difference, and worthlessness. These feelings fed into the overall sense of disadvantage the participants felt compared to their peers. When feelings of difference, isolation, and worthlessness were not communicated to family members or peers these feelings were defended against and were not integrated into one's sense of self. These three feelings dominated the psychological experience when they were defended against. Participants who achieved integration of vulnerability into their sense of self were more likely to be psychologically healthier, more able to reflect, and more able to use their experience as a tool to help others learn from it. They were also less isolated and less stigmatized by having an incarcerated parent. Again, what helped these participants was having a functional subsequent parent, having coping mechanisms to handle the stresses and emotions of the experience, and being able to communicate openly with the incarcerated parent about their thoughts and feelings.

Coping. The participant narratives highlighted the many different strategies used to cope with having an incarcerated parent. Themes of active versus weak strategies, “doing you,” and what was done to psychologically survive the experience were all used in service of keeping the self whole. Each participant, whether explicitly stated or not, alluded to active being better than weak strategies. This choice of being active versus weak was a defensive maneuver against feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Fear, anxiety, sadness, and anger were described as potentially overwhelming and debilitating to participants; therefore, each participant tried to handle these feelings in their own way. Trinity shared just how overwhelming it can be: “If I constantly focus on my mother and make that my life, I would get lost. You just cannot...I refuse to; my grandmamma always told me, you have your own life.” Similar to other losses, a person who has lost a parent to incarceration can be susceptible to feelings of self-harm. It is important for people who work with individuals who have an incarcerated parent to have a sense of the coping mechanisms and emotional experience of their patients. Participants indicated that being overwhelmed by the emotions was seen as weak and giving up. No participant saw him- or herself in this way. By being “active” the participants described their attempts to break the isolation and helplessness by seeking out others to help them face the experience. By enduring the experience with someone else, participants used the other person to help process the experience and create cohesion in their sense of self.

Jeremiah and Destiny’s narratives indicated an altruistic effort to share the experience. This altruism was a conscious choice to break isolation and stereotypes to help the current youth in the same situation. They felt that they had learned about themselves and their incarcerated parent and wanted others to learn from them. Not only

did this altruism make the participants feel better, but it was also used in a defensive manner. The altruistic stance sublimates the anger felt towards the incarcerated parent in an effort to keep a positive connection.

Another aspect of coping was the “doing you” mantra expressed in an earlier chapter. The experience is so complex that participants at some point came to a psychological realization that there were three options to dealing with the experience. Trinity’s previous statement about the three psychological choices was poignant. The choice to “live around it” is the psychological equivalent of defending against the experience in an effort to live life. This conceptualization of the experience is similar to how trauma is experienced in childhood, which will be explored in a later section. The choice to “come to terms” with the experience is to actively reflect and make sense of the experience. This process is not easy for individuals. Some participants talked about their experiences with a mental health professional to help them process and integrate the experience. The last choice of “going crazy,” alludes to a psychological breakdown from being overcome by the loss and trauma of the experience. This breakdown occurs because of inadequate coping mechanisms and support. Each participant described their decision about putting him- or herself first in an effort to live around or come to terms with the experience. By putting themselves first, participants felt as if they could be better able to support family members and the incarcerated parent. Jeremiah described how hard this decision was for him:

No, no, not like I do not see myself being like how I am now, during all this time, because um, it would be like, if I sit there for you, it’s like now my life is back on

hold again. So I am cutting my life short as far as giving me opportunities to do what I want to do while I am here.

Some participants expressed “doing it for them” by which they meant putting the incarcerated parent’s needs above one’s own needs. This theme dominated narratives until participants made the conscious choice to put themselves first. Participants described needing some agency and control over the experience especially the pain they felt. Therefore, cognitively the participant’s choice to visit had to be about his or her needs to be able to continue visiting the parent. The desire to see the incarcerated parent outweighs the dehumanizing and painful visiting processes at the prisons.

The participant narratives gave a window into the participant’s psychological survival of the experience of having an incarcerated parent. Psychological survival for participants meant getting their needs met, finding compensatory figures, and forging new attachments with others. These aspects can be considered part of the developmental process that occurs in adolescence or one part of processing trauma. Academics, acting out, friends/gangs, work, sports/instruments, and faith were all parts of psychological survival. Some participants’ narratives indicated that academics and school were an important part of how they survived the experience. Participants described school as a place where the participant’s self object needs of admiration could be met by teachers and other students. Aliyah was one of those students:

So it was like [I was] two different people; you’re one way at home, where you are just so like isolated to yourself and quiet and not really active, and then you get to school and be around your friends and teachers, just like [a] social butterfly and it’s...I was not the type where you know, I needed attention or anything, I

was not those, that type of person, where ah...[I] like sought it. I did not have to, it just...you never knew how my life was at home based off of how I was...You know, growing up from when I moved in with my dad and even like before this, always...at home is always different from what people thought.

Most participants indicated that they were smart, enjoyed school, and felt good about themselves in this venue. School, when looked at closely, was a place for these participants where they felt safe, connected with others, and where they could be adolescents without extra responsibilities. In this environment, participants could find compensatory figures to idealize, thereby filling the void that the incarcerated parent left. These idealized figures could be internalized and help the participants feel as though they are good as well. Aliyah described the joy she felt when she tutored another student. This interaction helped increase her self-esteem, since it allowed her to feel purposeful, competent, and good.

Another tactic used to psychologically survive the experience was acting out. Although acting out is a natural occurrence that happens during adolescence, the utility of the acting out was different for this population. First off, there was a group of participants that described behaving especially well in the service of allowing them to have privileges outside the home. These participants described their home life as empty and disconnected. Therefore, they desired to be out of the house for as long as they could. This is in comparison to the other group, who described acting out in relation to others. For this group, acting out was an unconscious effort to engage others. Their attempts were to reassure themselves that people were there, to get their needs met, and to use the other for psychological functions not yet internalized. Although it was not explicitly

stated, acting out was used as an avenue to release anger and connect others to the pain, sadness, and anger felt from the experience. Thus, any attention, even negative, was better than the isolation and disconnection.

Participants described the importance of having friends to psychological survival. Narratives indicated that friends provided a life-giving connection that opposed the disconnection and isolation felt from the experience of having an incarcerated parent. Friends were described to provide a sense of twinship. Friends provided connection and a sense of normalcy that was not felt at home. The few participants who alluded to gang-like behaviors described the experience of friendship in a different way. Friends provided a sense of safety and togetherness that was not felt at home for these participants. These friendships were the only place that these participants felt loved and like they belonged to something. For both these groups, friendship allowed participants the space to idealize others and be idealized for characteristics they had.

Another aspect of psychological survival was work. Some participants described working a couple of hours after classes were over for the day. These participants explicitly stated that work was a distraction from having an incarcerated parent. It helped keep their minds off of the pain and loss they felt. Work was also a way to keep safe and off the streets after school. Like the other activities, work was an adaptive way to get needs met and to defend against some of the feelings connected to the overall experience of having an incarcerated parent. The work environment not only taught the adolescents about the world of work, but it was also a place for the participants to feel connected to others. When they were acknowledged for their work, participants increased their self-esteem and fought against the disconnection and isolation they felt. These participants

had another place to find idealizable figures and compensatory figures to psychologically step in and fill the void left by development and the incarcerated parent. This increase in self-esteem was connected to seeing one's positive effect on the world which increased the sense of agency participants felt.

A few participants indicated that playing sports or playing an instrument provided an outlet to cope with having an incarcerated parent. Sports coaches or musical instructors provided the adolescents with idealizable and compensatory figures. These figures stepped into fulfill the roles and functions left behind by the incarcerated parent. More concretely, playing a sport or instrument also kept the participants safe, off the streets, and out of getting in trouble. These activities were also outlets for anger and pain that were pent up in the body. Participants were also able to gain admiration from coaches, teammates, and audiences through playing either a sport or an instrument. This admiration and connection helped fill the void that participants felt when a parent was incarcerated. These coping mechanisms, whether they were adaptive or used defensively, were used in the service of surviving the experience. Some participants expressed their use of partying, smoking marijuana, and praying as ways to manage the experience. These three actions were in an effort to stay cohesive and to take the edge off of the pain, anxiety, or sadness felt when a parent was incarcerated. The researcher acknowledges that adolescence is a time when adolescents try drinking and smoking. However, participant narratives indicated that these participants' use was more than curiosity.

Last but not least, faith and the church were used as a way to organize the experience and cope with having an incarcerated parent. The church and having faith in God provided participants with a concrete way to organize their emotional experience. It

is also developmentally appropriate in adolescence for teens to look to the church to help them internalize morals and guidelines. Faith was a large part of most participant narratives. Faith helped provide a canvas for the “bigger picture.” Destiny was one person who felt this way:

You know, outside of putting God first, who is going to tell you whatever he needs to tell you to benefit you? Like, he’s not going to tell you something to benefit the next man or whatever he is telling you to do or leading you to do I am sure it’s to benefit you.

This provided strength, connection, guidance, and support through a group of believers. The church was described to be a pseudo-family where participants felt like they belonged, had a sense of security, and felt protected. Participants expressed that God gave them strength during hard times. Many participants expressed the belief that God does not give you something you cannot handle. This belief helped participants internalize a sense of strength that they did not have before. Therefore, God was an idealizable figure that got internalized by participants in an effort to draw on goodness and strength to get through a tough experience. God was also described as a protector and a provider of safety to those that follow him. Furthermore, God was used as a pseudo-parental figure to allow participants the ability to continue his or her development. Some participants indicated that the Bible held importance for them as well. The Bible was described as an object that gave tangible guidelines and rules one should follow, and hence internalize. Participants expressed the use of passages from the Bible to help them get through hard times using these passages like mantras to help them process the

experience. Some participants even used passages from the Bible and sermons in discussions with the incarcerated parent in an effort to teach the parent.

Lingering questions. There were two haunting questions that arose out of participant descriptions of the phenomenon. The first question was “Will I ever get over this experience?” The second question: “Does prison really rehabilitate?” This last question masked a deeper question, which was “Will I get my same parent back?” Each participant expressed these two worries. There was a very real sense, even as an adult, that this phenomenon made them different than others. For participants who were able to accept that these experiences happened and were able to integrate their feelings, the differentness was not experienced as a worry or vulnerability, but as something that made them want to teach others. Other participants worried that they would never get over the experience. This worry indicated that these participants were still processing the phenomenon and their emotions. The question of “Will I get my parent back?” got at what kind of mindset their parent would have once released from prison. Participant narratives described how incarcerated parents shared stories of stabbings and the crazy things that happen in prisons. Although it was not explicitly stated, participants worried about having to experience this phenomenon again. Jeremiah reported that if his parent ended up in prison again, he was ready to get on with his life without his parent, therefore indicating that on some level he had put his life on hold to help his parent through the experience. The question of “Does prison rehabilitate?” weighs heavily on participants because their agency has no bearing on the outcome. The outcome is up to the incarcerated parent. Participants described trying not to think about this question.

This section highlights the psychological headspace that individuals are in when this phenomenon occurs. How one deals with vulnerability, coping, and having many lingering questions impacts how one functions in the world. Psychological survival of this disorienting experience involves forming connections to others that understand the experience and can help a person deal with the aforementioned concepts.

Finding #2: Emotional impact of parental incarceration. The phenomenon of parental incarceration is an overwhelming and disorienting experience, which only underscores the importance of understanding this part of the phenomenon. This section covers the following: emotions, defenses, and abandonments. By understanding the emotional experience one can be more attuned to the adolescent going through the phenomenon.

Emotions. The interviews suggested that this form of loss differs in important ways from other types of loss. The participants who as adolescents had an incarcerated parent described their emotional landscape as including the following: disbelief/denial, confusion, fear/anxiety/worry, sadness, helplessness, anger, ambivalence, and for some participants, acceptance. This emotional landscape was not experienced as linear but fluid. Participants described flowing in and out of these emotions over the course of the experience. Each emotion is explored individually to allow the reader to fully understand the participants' experience.

Disbelief/Denial. Participants described a feeling of disbelief that activated denial at the beginning of the experience of having an incarcerated parent. Participant narratives indicated that participants experienced disbelief at the parent's actions during the arrest

phase and right before the sentencing phase. Aliyah described how her belief in the criminal justice system was shaken because she could not imagine a system that would take away a parent. Participants also described initial denial of the parent's actions and that it was not their parent that made a mistake. Participants experienced denial before he or she knew all of the information about the incarcerated parent's situation. This lack of information fueled hope that the experience was just a bad dream and they would wake up from it at any moment. The denial serves to protect the adolescent psyche from loss. The initial disbelief in the criminal justice system is born out of the social more about a parent being all-knowing and looking out for his or her offspring. Adolescents hold the belief that a parent would not willingly leave or abandon them.

Confusion. Most research participants described a period of confusion in relation to the experience. This period of confusion was laden with questions and doubts about the incarcerated parent's whereabouts, their actions, and the story told to them. This confusion impacted the participant's ability to integrate the experience, especially if the adolescent was not told the full story. This part of the experience challenges another social more about parenting. Children and adolescents have a notion that a parent will protect them. As a result of this broken notion, participants were left feeling confused and with many questions. Each participant shared that he or she had overheard others discussing the parent's incarceration and actions. Participants indicated that overheard stories added to the felt confusion and lack of trust and truth. Participants who were not told the truth at first felt as if they were lied to on purpose therefore increasing the sense of mistrust in adult figures.

Fear/anxiety/worry. All participants touched on fear/anxiety/worry in relation to themselves, the incarcerated parent, the subsequent parent, and the situation in which they lived. Many participants described a fear of losing his or her subsequent parent after losing a parent to prison. Some participants described multiple losses that either occurred before the incarcerated parent went to prison or after the incarceration. Therefore, this worry about the subsequent parent's health and wellbeing is similar to that of the child who has lost his or her parent to death or disease. There is a real fear of becoming an "orphan." This fear is an indication that the world is a scary and overwhelming place to be without a parent. This fear is an indicator of an adolescent's felt anxiety when a parent's love, protection, and the safety he or she provides are taken away. This anxiety is similar to Melanie Klein's (1946) depressive position, where a child fears the loss of love from the parent.

Participants who visited the prison talked about having a real worry about the parent's safety in prison. This fear was not unfounded, because participants shared stories they heard of prisoners getting jumped and stabbed. Incidents like these necessitate lockdowns at the prison. For participants, these lockdowns, where one could not talk to or visit prisoners, were filled with anxiety. Participants described that without any information, their imaginations and worries got the best of them until they were able to talk with the incarcerated parent.

It is an unfortunate reality that some participants expressed a fear of being killed themselves in retaliation for their parent's actions. The fear of retaliation incited annihilation fears because the outer world truly became too dangerous for some participants. Some participants described a fear that they were similar to their

incarcerated parents and had the same “ugliness inside of them.” They wanted to be different. Part of this fear came from their vulnerable sense of self, as well as from society’s message that these adolescents were similar to their parents. Lastly, participants described an anxiety about what would happen to them physically and psychologically because of this experience. The researcher understood this anxiety to be connected to the psychological core self when this experience happens. This anxiety internally churns up feelings of doubt and shame, along with many other unanswered questions that start to erode one’s sense of self, identity, and cohesion.

Sadness. Another part of the emotional landscape of having an incarcerated parent includes sadness. All participants touched on the sadness they felt during this experience. Sadness showed up in different phases of the incarceration experience: during the sentencing phase, when the adolescent heard how long the sentence would be; during the actual incarceration phase itself; and after visiting the prison. For the participants whose parents were released from prison, there was discussion about sadness felt at the realization that the parent was not who they hoped he or she would be upon release. Furthermore, participants conveyed the loss in terms of the physical absence of their parent from their lives, the psychological functions that the parent provided, and the loss of love, protection, investment, and security that a parent brings to an adolescent’s world. The participants described a void, the feeling of something missing, and feeling different from others because of it. This sense of loss and sadness contributed to feelings of isolation and difference. These feelings were heightened when participants felt that they could not confide in another about the experience. Societal pressure in connection to parental incarceration only furthered the feelings of isolation. Participants who visited his

or her parent talked about how difficult their feelings were, including feeling sad and heartbroken, after visiting the parent. These visits were described as a double-edged sword, highlighting the excitement to see the parent and the pain felt at the end of the visit. The researcher uncovered from participant experiences that when one loves somebody, one is willing to put oneself through hell. Participant descriptions of prison visits capture the sense of deprivation and sadness that was experienced when participants visited the incarcerated parents and could only communicate through a glass barrier and a speaking hole. These participants described their overwhelming desire and need to be held by the parent, which was physically impossible, thereby making goodbyes harder and more painful.

Helplessness. Each of the participants reported feeling helpless in one way or another with the experience. Some participants described their helplessness in relation to how one judge or twelve jurors decide not only the parent's fate, but the participant's fate as well. Participants felt as if they were impacted by a system that did not take them into account in their parent's life: that all the criminal justice system cared about was punishment of the "bad guy." Participants described parts of the experience that were outside of their control but had difficulty thinking of it in terms of helplessness. Some participants described the helplessness in relation to the desire to change the situation and the realization that there was no way for them to change it. Other participants talked about wanting to influence the incarcerated parent's thoughts and feelings, but having their attempts be thwarted or dismissed by the parent. Participants described the cascade of changes that occurred after the parent was incarcerated and being at the mercy of the subsequent parent. Thus, participants described how decisions were made about moves,

schools, and friends without their influence or opinion. Participants described a similar internal experience when the prison went on lockdown. The sense of helplessness in these situations indicates that the adolescent's growing sense of agency is getting squashed. These participants learned that the system has more power and agency than they do in the situation.

Anger. Anger was the most defended-against emotion out of the entire emotional experience. Anger was the one emotion discussed in hushed tones and was the hardest to identify within the participants' lives. As the researcher listened to the participants' narratives, there was a strong desire to keep the incarcerated parent good. Anger towards the incarcerated parent felt too threatening. Narratives indicated that the anger experienced was not only towards the incarcerated parent, but also towards the system for failing them and towards themselves for not being a good enough child. The anger felt towards the incarcerated parent and the experience felt too threatening to express overtly, so this anger was expressed covertly. Anger was expressed through self-injurious behavior, listening to aggressive music, causing disruptions, and acting out in school. The participants that displayed their anger in the above-mentioned ways displaced their anger on someone or something else in an attempt to defend against it. There were other participants who displaced anger onto the larger system to defend against it or to disavow it in order to be able to function. It was easier to be angry at something other than the incarcerated parent. Participants did not experience anger as a useful emotion or tool to engage others. Expressing this anger was felt to threaten an already weak relationship with the incarcerated parent, as well as to not change the outcome. Anger could not be used to change the criminal justice system's decision. If anything, the expression of anger

could make things worse in the criminal justice system because behaviors are taken at face value.

Ambivalence. Many participants described feelings of ambivalence towards the parent or the whole experience. This ambivalence for many participants surrounded the desire to find answers to questions and what the answers meant to them. There was unease and ambivalence about what it meant to one's sense of self to have an incarcerated parent. The participants that described being able to break through their ambivalence and integrate the experience into their sense of self had the following: relationships with the incarcerated parent, being were told the truth, and a supportive subsequent parent to help them integrate the information. Sadly, not every participant had this support. Therefore, some participants' experiences continued unintegrated along the split between good and bad, out of awareness. Thus this ambivalence stunted some participants' psychological growth and left the participants with many unanswered questions that connected to his or her identity. These unanswered questions were the most difficult aspect for the participants. It increased their struggle with ambivalence towards the experience, the incarcerated parent, and the loss.

Acceptance. As stated earlier, not every participant achieved acceptance of the experience. The participants who accepted the situation and his or her incarcerated parent's actions were different from those who did not. The difference between the two groups was connected to the subsequent parent's ability to parent. Participants that reached acceptance had a subsequent parent who continued to parent whether or not the incarcerated parent was active in parenting. The subsequent parent was not overwhelmed by their emotions or experience, which allowed the subsequent parent to be used by the

adolescent in processing the experience. The subsequent parent's ability to stay emotionally neutral allowed the participant's relationship to grow with the incarcerated parent, unencumbered by other people's perspectives. This allowed the relationship and communication to unfold naturally between the incarcerated parent and the adolescent. Communication, in all of its various forms, was important to reaching a place of acceptance. This communication was essential for the participants because they got a chance to talk with the incarcerated parent, ask questions, get answers, and hear the truth. Hearing the truth about what landed the parent in prison was important for the participant's processing of the loss, as well as for moving psychological development along. The subsequent parent's ability to parent facilitates many processes that help rebuild trust between the incarcerated parent and the participant, which allowed for acceptance of the situation and an ability to move forward.

Two-thirds of the participants expressed feeling lucky in relation to the entire experience. Many participants reported that their experience could have been worse: that even though it was difficult, tough, and emotionally draining, it was better than some of the alternatives. Some participants discussed feeling lucky because the incarcerated parent received a short sentence. Other participants described feeling lucky because they had extended family members who looked after them and they did not end up in the foster care system. When the experience of having an incarcerated parent was juxtaposed against having to go into the foster care system, these participants felt as though they avoided a potentially worse situation. For participants whose parents got released, they expressed feeling lucky that the parent learned their lesson. From a psychological perspective, the feeling of being lucky was the defense of reaction formation to keep the

self cohesive. Participants had to view part of their experience in this way to feel that their pain and suffering meant something.

Each participant transcended his or her emotional experience in his or her own way. The participant's internal experience of having a parent incarcerated was mediated not only by outside forces, such as a subsequent parent, but also by internal forces such as conscious and unconscious defenses.

Defenses. A discussion of emotional experience would not be complete without a discussion of defenses. Defenses were used to either heighten or defend against the experience. Participant's narratives indicated that there were three general defenses used throughout the experience: denial, deidealization, and deidentification; as well as the use of other conscious and unconscious defenses.

Denial. As stated previously in relation to the emotional experience, denial was a big part of this experience. Denial as a defense was used mostly at the beginning of the participant's experience. This defense was employed to help protect the participant's psyche from the impending loss. Denial was an adaptive defense at the beginning of the experience, since it was unclear as to whether the parent was innocent or guilty. Aliyah described her denial at first in the following way:

Um, all during the process it was still like she's going to be fine, she is going to come home. You know, the verdict would be in our favor. They're not going to take away someone away from five, you know, kids, and um, leave us by ourselves. And um, it was kind of...I think it kind of went fast.

This defense allows time for internal resources and energy to be marshaled for the participant to weather the experience. This time also gives external resources, such as subsequent parents or other family members time to gather around the adolescent to help them through the experience. Denial becomes maladaptive after the parent was convicted of a crime and sentenced to prison. None of the study's participants were stuck in denial. At some point, each of the participants moved out of this adaptive defense to other defenses as he or she started to process and come to terms with this experience.

Deidealization. Another widely used defense was deidealization. This defense is a process that happens naturally during psychological development. Therefore it is not surprising that this defense was used. Developmentally, the deidealization process of a parent happens gradually over time as the adolescent slowly starts to internalize the parental functions into their own psyche and creates the internal psychic structure. During this natural process, the adolescent seeks out friendships and compensatory figures to fill the void that is left by the parents. Unfortunately, with a parent in prison there is no gradual process, so the deidealization occurs rapidly. It disrupts the natural developmental flow and can be experienced as traumatic since it is a premature rupture of the self object functions a parent fulfills for his or her child. Therefore it heightens the search for relationships to help build up one's sense of self when a parent is incarcerated. When participants did not have a functional subsequent parent who could help them navigate the deidealization process, compensatory figures and friends became increasingly important. Deidealization is a grandiose adaptation to parental failure since the participants could no longer rely on the self object functions a parent provides his or her child. It is at this crossroads that a person may join gangs in an effort to fulfill self

object needs as well as try to build internal self structure. Although there were no self-identified gang members in the study, it sounded like a few flirted with this kind of group when in search of another individual to help one with this experience.

The use of this defense causes potential conflict with the loss process. The loss process involves the individual slowly letting go of the connection to the lost individual, but at the same time identifying with and introjecting a part of the lost person. Disruption can occur between defenses and the mourning process. The mourning process and the defenses that are engaged in this experience have different goals. If the psyche is dependent on deidealization of the parent to stay cohesive, then the mourning process is derailed.

Deidentification. The phenomenon of deidentification occurred within the larger phenomenon of having an incarcerated parent. Participants described deidentification as the desire, expression, and actions taken to differentiate themselves from the shame connected to having an incarcerated parent. This defensive process was seen on a continuum from massive deidentification to smaller expressions of this defense. Some participants described how infuriating it was when another individual equated them to the incarcerated individual. Numerous participants reported being irritated by hearing “You are just like your mother or father.” These kinds of comments led some participants to massively deidentify themselves from their parent through tantrums or strongly worded comebacks. Most participants that expressed this kind of overt rejection of the parent struggled with introjecting the parent into their psyche because it felt too dangerous to be identified with the shame. These participants were afraid that if they allowed themselves to take in their parents, they might become their parent and be bad like them. Participants

who relied on the defense of splitting tended to massively deidentify from the incarcerated parent. This process brought the participant face to face with the ambivalence felt towards the incarcerated parent. Therefore, this process is a defensive maneuver against the anxiety, shame, and danger felt by incorporating the parent into their psychic lives. Participants who were able to tolerate and integrate the parent's actions into their psychic lives were able to make the distinction that the parent's mistake does not define them. Therefore their deidentification process from their parent was less defensively motivated.

Conscious defenses. As participants shared their narratives it became clear that participants engaged in defenses, some consciously and others unconsciously. Conscious defenses that were prominent for this group of participants included taking care of others, fantasy, distraction, humor, and minimization.

Taking care of others. There were many instances of the study's participants taking care of others. These others included the incarcerated parent, family members, and even the researcher. Part of this defense was influenced by birth order and temperament; however, that did not explain this defense fully. Another aspect of this defense was influenced by loss. Participants felt that they lost one parent and they did not want to lose another; ergo they felt the need to take care of others. Therefore, taking care of others was a defensive move to keep loved ones safe and healthy. Some participants were externally pressured into becoming a caretaker for younger siblings. This experience necessitated the oldest child in some families to take on more responsibilities and duties. For other participants, this was an internal pressure to defend against feelings of helplessness and fulfill needs of admiration and love through giving one's self to others.

Fantasy. Some participants described fantasies and daydreams from when they were adolescents. These fantasies meant different things for different participants. Aliyah used her fantasies as a way to escape the emotional deprivation she felt after her parent was imprisoned. These fantasies were a breath of life for her. They allowed her to imagine a world in which she was not isolated and received the love that she desired. These fantasies allowed her to survive in the real world, which was desolate. Other participants described fantasies that were used to fulfill needs, such as feeling loved, admired, and like a part of something. For these participants, the real world was not meeting these needs for one reason or another. Therefore, this defense filled the void left by the incarcerated parent. Imagination was also described as a way to try on or practice something before bringing it into the real world. Jeremiah and Vernon described their daydreams in this way: to make sure they made the correct decision. For these participants, it was used to break down one big goal into manageable smaller goals before they made it final in the real world.

Distraction. All of the participants indicated that they did things to distract themselves from the pain, anxiety, shame, humiliation, and anger they felt at the incarcerated parent or the situation. Distractions helped keep the participant busy and not dwelling on the experience. Distractions came in many forms. Some participants eased the pain by working or going to church. Other participants stayed out with friends. Aliyah described reading as a distraction. Some participants drank or used drugs as a distraction. Therefore, when one was distracted one could not ruminate on the situation and emotions felt.

Humor. Some participants discussed the role that humor played in the experience. Humor was used after some time had passed once the parent was incarcerated, to ease the pain and sadness of the situation. This defense helped participants through painful times like missed birthdays, holidays, and major life events such as prom or high school graduation. Some participants shared that when their incarcerated parent could make light of the experience it allowed the participant to feel freer to do the same. Being able to joke about the experience with friends and family members created connection and interaction with others that was important to managing the experience.

Minimization. Participants described engaging in the defense of minimization. This defense, like the others, was in service of taking the edge off of the psychic pain. By minimizing the experience, participants were attempting to take the importance away from the situation. Vernon attempted to do just that:

No, so I just let him do him. That's how, that's really how I do everybody though. I do not really mess with other people. I just keep to my circle, the main couple of people I mess with. I do me. That is just all, I guess, yeah. So I guess you could say that from the experiences from then till now, I guess you could say that made me who I am. Because I went through a lot of stuff because of it, but you know, I think because of it I was, would say that like, I guess you could say I am better because I learned a lot of stuff from that experience I went through, and it made me, you know, mature. So I guess you could say that.

Thus, if the experience was not as significant, then the pain, anger, and anxiety felt was not all-consuming, terrifying, or worrisome. This defense helped to allow the participants to focus on other things during adolescence that were more age-appropriate;

therefore, it was adaptive and in the service of furthering one's psychological development.

Unconscious defenses. Every human, including those who have experienced a parental incarceration, uses unconscious defenses to exist in the world, especially when something unthinkable happens. Although there were many different unconscious defenses employed by the participants, the following defenses were used the most: enactments, reaction formation, splitting, idealization, internalization, and disavowal. Since these defenses were used the most, they have greater significance to the experience of having an incarcerated parent.

Enactments. Participants whose incarcerated parent was not willing to parent or allow him- or herself to be influenced by the adolescent engaged in enactments. Enactments were an attempt to stay connected to the parent. Letting go of a loved object (i.e., the parent) is terribly hard for any person and it is especially painful when the adolescent's loved object rejects them. While outwardly expressing the opposite, the participants who engaged in enactments were trying to stay connected to the rejecting parent. The participants were also attempting to master and understand the experience through the use of this defense. Vernon's enactment in high school of rejecting help from teachers and probation officers was similar to his father rejecting his help. Although Vernon did not end up in prison like his father, he was trying to understand aspects of his loss without another person's help. Participants who engaged in enactments were left to figure out the experience and their emotions alone without the help of subsequent parents.

Reaction formation. Many participants used this defense as an outlet for repressed wishes. The participant's need for love, care, and affection was repressed out of

awareness in the service of cohesion. However, this need was engaged unconsciously through reaction formation in the form of taking care of others. Trinity, who wishes to know and understand her incarcerated father but has no connection with him, helps others look up their loved ones on the prison website. She helps facilitate visits for others since she could not do it for herself. However, this desire for connection with her incarcerated father is overwhelming, and she defends against the anger and fear that feels threatening to her fragile sense of self. For Trinity, this unconscious defense is adaptive in an effort to keep her self structure cohesive. Participants who had a relationship with the incarcerated parent used this defense against anger felt towards the parent. This anger was changed into lessons that the adolescent taught the incarcerated parent in an effort to prevent the parent from going to prison again.

Splitting. Society and participants both used the splitting defense. It was apparent through participant narratives that society's messages are experienced as a split. In the public's eye, the incarcerated parent was either good or bad but never both. Some participants also unconsciously viewed their world through the same lenses. Trinity described her relationship with her previously incarcerated mother in this way. Trinity also had a hard time believing that her mother has changed and has incorporated "goodness" into her life. The trauma she experienced when her mother went to prison, as well as the anxiety she felt because she was left with unanswered questions, influenced her use of splitting in an attempt to manage her internal experience. This defense is used in relation to keeping the fragile self together since the anxiety felt about "badness" was overwhelming and felt intrusive.

Idealization. Although the study's participants did not fully idealize their incarcerated parents, they did idealize other people. Participants defensively idealized aspects of the incarcerated parent in the service of keeping the parent good. Many of the participants idealized the incarcerated parent in some small way. They connected with the parent's intelligence or some innocuous physical attribute they both shared that did not threaten the cohesion of the sense of self. Idealization and introjection of some part of the incarcerated parent is an important part of the mourning process. However, that type of idealization is different. Some participants noted that as they became an adult and were able to reflect on not only their actions, but also the actions of others, they came to realize that their family members also idealized the incarcerated parent. Destiny wondered if her grandmother's idealization of her incarcerated father had to do with her narcissistic investment in him that viewing her father in any other way would be a devastating narcissistic injury and would threaten her grandmother's sense of self.

Disavowal. Disavowal as a defense was used by many of the study's participants in an effort to move on in their lives. The experience was so large that participants could not disavow the entire experience, but disavowed parts of it. Participants used the defense in disavowing feelings of vulnerability and sadness that come along with this experience. Most participants wanted to see themselves as strong, able, and that they learned something from the experience of having an incarcerated parent, and to not feel vulnerable. Not acknowledging vulnerability gave the participants the perceived ability to continue and attain his or her goals.

Abandonments. Participants experienced a parent's incarceration as a psychological abandonment. Narratives described the physical and psychological loss felt when the

incarcerated parent went to prison. Some participants' narratives uncovered multiple losses, which added complexity to their emotional experience, as if the parent going to prison prompted a series of mini-abandonments. Aliyah described her life after her mother went to prison:

And I think that really spun from when I was younger. Because my mom left me. My granddad died and my sisters, we got split up, and for a long time, like, I didn't even have communication with my older sisters...

When a parent is imprisoned and the adolescent is placed with a subsequent parent this act alone prompted small changes that were described like abandonments. Participants discussed the breaking up of siblings and the family when a parent is incarcerated. It is difficult for one subsequent parent to work, go to school, watch the children, and fulfill the needs of all the children. Because of this difficulty, siblings are often split up among family members. Some participants described the loss of a home since the home became too expensive to live in without the incarcerated parent's income. These moves took the participants out of neighborhoods they had grown up in. Each change and loss highlighted the loss, pain, disconnection, and continued changes.

Thus, when a parent becomes incarcerated, it is not just one loss but many losses. Aliyah described that with each move her family made, along with the splitting up of her family, she became more and more isolated. For her, everything that was familiar was gone and taken away. After multiple losses and perceived abandonments, the isolation and disconnection became internalized as a fear and vulnerability, which made it harder for her and other participants to get close to people. Part of the fear felt has to do with getting close to someone who, based on past experience, will leave. Participants with

multiple moves and losses were more psychologically alone, disconnected, and less able to allow themselves to be with people. This self-isolation initially did not start out as a defense, but grew into one to protect the self from getting hurt and falling apart. It is also a defensive maneuver against the anger and rage felt towards the parent for leaving the adolescent without their physical presence, love, and attention. This defensive maneuver became very apparent through Vernon's narrative, where he tried to isolate himself from any family member that he felt was partly responsible for the incarcerated parent.

Because he felt so much pain, hurt, anger, and disconnection from the abandonment of his loved one, it is not a surprise that he and some of these participants struggle to find a romantic partner. If one's psychological experience is that "All the people that I love and get close to leave me," it would be hard to allow oneself to be vulnerable and to be able to stay in an intimate relationship.

This section explained in detail the emotional experience an adolescent can experience when a parent is incarcerated. By understanding the emotions, defenses, and abandonments connected to the phenomenon, the reader has a clearer view of the internal experience. Therefore, internal forces could influence behaviors and emotions connected to the phenomenon.

Finding #3: Social impact of parental incarceration. The relationships that will be reviewed in connection to this finding are the following: the participant's relationship with the incarcerated parent, the subsequent parent, the same-sex parent, society, and essential others. By taking a deeper look at the relationship the adolescent might have with each person the kinds of relationships that will be most beneficial to the adolescent's functioning will appear.

Incarcerated parent. The participant narratives indicated that the family constellation physically and psychologically changes when a parent is incarcerated. There can be major changes in relation to the incarcerated parent. Because of the dehumanizing and alienating living situations in prison, the incarcerated parent is forced to rely on his or her family as a psychological lifeline to stay connected. Therefore, participants who had communication or visits with the incarcerated parent ended up reversing roles with the incarcerated parent, as indicated in the participant narratives. Participants described the role reversal that occurred without fully understanding the process. During this process the adolescent becomes the incarcerated parent's parent in order to teach him or her lessons. The participants described teaching the parent lessons from the Bible; things they learned about themselves and about the situation from therapists or groups; and even lessons from school. These lessons were in the service of helping the parent rehabilitate, so that if they were released, the parent would not leave the adolescent again. There was an unconscious drive to have the parent learn his or her lesson so that the time spent in prison away from the adolescent would mean something. Therefore, participants not only have a desire to be good themselves, but also have a drive for their incarcerated parent to do the same. When the incarcerated parents rejected metabolized lessons from their adolescent, the adolescent experienced disappointment and anger towards them. Vernon described his reaction to his parent rejecting him:

I mean, it made me feel bad because it is like, you know, it's like, you get to a point where you keep doing the same stuff you, you recognize what you doing as the problem, but you grown, and I guess you cannot see that. I can see that and I was not grown, but you cannot, so I am not going to stress you about it. I mean, I

was one of them people where I would always think about it too hard and get myself all emotional about it, but I came to the point where I'm like, I was 17, I am not going to work myself up about other people and what they do. Because it's not, it don't benefit me. So I am going to do what I need to do for me. And that is just how I went about mine. You know, because I just got tired [of] waiting on another person to do what I could not do. You know, I mean, grown or not, I can still go get up and get what I need to get, I mean, one way or the other.

Participants whose parent was released from prison described disappointment in their relationship. Participants textualized the disappointment at having to teach the formerly incarcerated parent how to parent. Therefore, the navigation of parenting post-release was difficult. Participants reported that the navigation of parenting was placed on them. Depending on how open to this idea both parties were, this indicated how successful the transition was for the dyad.

The process of deidentification changes as the family changes. What makes this psychological process tricky is that this process of deidentification and deidealization of a parent happens naturally during the developmental process. This developmental process is described in more detail in a later section. Participants described the societal messages that burdened them. As stated elsewhere, these messages were about how immoral and bad their incarcerated parents were. Each child during early development idealizes his or her parent and identifies with their parents. However, after a parent becomes incarcerated there is a push to quickly deidentify from the parent. This process is influenced by the notion that one could be just as aggressive or "dangerous" as society states, which is

threatening to the participant's sense of self. This deidentification process is an attempt to keep the self cohesive.

The narratives described the desire for the incarcerated parent to keep on parenting. Just because the parent was no longer at home did not mean that this desire disappeared. Regardless of what the relationship was like before the parent was incarcerated, all participants described a desire for the parent to be a parent. What determined an incarcerated parent's ability to parent from prison included the willingness to fulfill the parental role and the willingness of the subsequent parent to allow the participant to see the incarcerated parent. This desire for the incarcerated parent to parent was an attempt to stay connected with them. The participants needed that parent's psychic functions and love to continue to develop. Many participants did not want to give up on their parents. Giving up on the parent was described as a last resort.

As stated earlier in the results section, some subsequent parents and incarcerated parents parented and others did not. Participants described a loss of respect for the incarcerated parent who would not parent them or talk candidly to them. This loss of respect was a defensive maneuver against the realization that the parent did not love the participant or themselves enough to tell the truth. This realization would have been too overwhelming and painful for the participant to experience fully. Participants described the fantasies about the incarcerated parent that allowed them to keep some part of the incarcerated parent alive inside them. These fantasies were used as a way to feel loved by and connected to the incarcerated parent even though they could not physically be with them. However, for participants whose parents were released, the reality of having the parent home was nothing like their fantasies. Aliyah described the reality of being with

her parent after the parent was released: “Not so good. So, you wait for so long for something and it finally happens, and it did not pan out the way you expected. Yeah. We rarely talk now.” Navigating reality with the parent home was not easy. In this situation the adolescent does not have much control. Teaching, imparting wisdom, and parenting the parent is the adolescent’s effort to defend against feeling helpless and without a sense of agency.

Subsequent parent. The subsequent parent and his or her ability to parent while their counterpart was incarcerated influenced how participants understood, processed, and psychically organized the experience in a big way. The subsequent parent’s feelings towards the incarcerated parent influenced how the adolescent interacted with the incarcerated parent. Participants who had a functional subsequent parent expressed a sense that the subsequent parent made sacrifices so that the participants did not have to make them. These participants described not feeling as many external pressures placed on them, so they could continue to be an adolescent like anyone else at their age. The participants described feeling supported, loved, and invested in by their relationship with the subsequent parent. They felt that the subsequent parent seemed to know what they needed, provided boundaries for them, and helped the participants to develop.

However, participants who did not have a functional subsequent parent described their internal experience differently. The members of this group felt that they were not as provided for as the other group and that they had to rely on themselves to get their needs known and met. These participants described feeling that they had additional external pressures placed on them since the subsequent parent was dysfunctional. For some this meant taking care of younger siblings, having to forfeit being a teenager, and doing more

household chores since the subsequent parent was incapacitated for one reason or another. Aliyah described her experience in the following way:

So then I kind of, you know, got put in a role of being head of the house, watching my little sister and making sure, you know, things were okay. Dinner was cooked and stuff like that. So not too many [people] besides my god-aunt...that was really the only person.

These extra burdens only increased the feeling of being alone and unloved and feeling the void that was left by the incarcerated parent. These participants described family decisions that were made without anyone discussing anything with them. These participants described how their subsequent parents told them things without helping them understand them; thus, they were left to their own devices to make sense of the experience or situation. These participants described feelings of anxiety, anger, and ambivalence towards both the incarcerated parent and the subsequent parent. These feelings were dealt with in the idiosyncratic ways of each of the participants. However, the defenses employed by each participant were in an effort to keep the connection alive with the incarcerated parent and the subsequent parent. Anger and anxiety were too threatening to the tenuous tie to the parents and one's sense of self; therefore, they had to be defended against.

Participant narratives also unearthed two different psychic experiences when a subsequent parent was functional. The first experience was when the subsequent parent was functional but vilified the incarcerated parent. The second experience was when the subsequent parent allowed connection with the incarcerated parent and made the incarcerated parent psychologically available. The participants who described having a

functional subsequent parent but by whom the incarcerated parent was vilified described experiencing more ambivalence. Even though the participant felt he or she was being provided for, his or her perspective of the world was split. This defensive splitting was used because the adolescent adopted the subsequent parent's defense structure. The participants were not expected to have their own opinion or interest in knowing who the incarcerated parent was. These participants described a desire to know the incarcerated individual and to see if the parent was really as bad as he or she was made out to be. This unknown quality of the incarcerated parent placed a huge burden on the participants because these participants were left with burning questions related to identity and what it meant to be related to a villain. Although participants described cognitively understanding that the subsequent parent was trying to protect them, they felt that it did not ring true emotionally. These participants were left with unanswered questions that impacted their identity and view of the world. These participants described feeling more anxious and ambivalent due to the use of splitting and the lack of internalized structure.

The participants who had a functional subsequent parent that allowed the incarcerated parent to be psychically available had a different internal experience. These participants described feeling loved and provided for by both parents. The participant was allowed to have his or her own relationship and emotional experience with the incarcerated parent that was separate from the subsequent parent's relationship. These participants described both parents as being able to explain and titrate the participant's experience so it could be understood. These participants were able to ask questions and have a say in decisions that were made. This type of parenting allowed the participants to feel a sense of agency that influenced what was happening to them. This sense of agency and attuned parenting

allowed for them to feel like they were in control of their emotions and surroundings. These participants described having to rely less on primitive defenses and could tolerate ambivalence. They could engage with the experience on a higher cognitive level that allowed them to integrate it into their sense of self without feeling too vulnerable. Both parents managed the anxiety, anger, and disappointment felt in this experience because they were attuned and psychologically available to help mitigate and metabolize the emotions. Xavior's unhindered relationship with his incarcerated father helped him get to the following insight:

Um, maybe the knowledge but I would not say that it shaped me because I would not feel that um, he was always, he was the man of the house anyway, so I would not feel like that his jail knowledge influenced me, but it pretty much, it taught me that, that it is a place that I would never want to go.

Therefore, having an incarcerated parent and subsequent parent who were functional, allowed the other to be psychologically available to the participant, and allowed for real connection between the parent and adolescent enabled the participants to be in a psychologically better position in relation to the experience.

Same-sex parent. Participants whose incarcerated parent was the same-sex parent described their psychological experience with a slight difference. This difference was the described desire for parenting by and need for the same-sex parent during his or her adolescence, when physical changes occur. Aliyah described that she would have been more comfortable if her mother had been present while she was going through the emotional adolescent changes. She described feeling very alone during this process and after. Perhaps her father, the subsequent parent, did not know how to handle her budding

sexuality. She reported that he struggled to discuss changing emotions in peers and love interests. Jeremiah talked about what he missed by not having a male parental figure there to help him process the physical changes, as well as to help him navigate being an African-American male adolescent. Jeremiah and Aliyah described an extra psychological layer of isolation that occurs when the same-sex parent is incarcerated. Without the same-sex parent at home, these participants described missing out on unspoken lessons that occur between a mother and daughter or father and son, such as dating etiquette. These participants felt that they were left to figure these things out on their own. Thus, a greater void was felt by participants whose incarcerated parent was the same-sex parent. It is important for adolescents to have a same-sex compensatory figure to allow for gender-specific guidance.

Society. Societal attitudes play a huge role in the experience of having an incarcerated parent. Each participant described an internal sense of shame and the external pressure of stigma connected to having an incarcerated parent. Aliyah described how it influenced her to be silent: “But um, I was more like, I do not know, I guess since I was younger and being told not to talk about it, I just kind of felt ashamed and embarrassed that it happened.” Originally the criminal justice system was set up to rehabilitate its constituents and then release them. However, over the many decades, this purpose has been forgotten. Currently, the criminal justice system is about punishment for the crimes committed. Therefore, the person who committed the crime and their humanity have been lost. Participants described feeling like they had to pay for their parent’s mistakes. There was an unspoken message that if you came from a family that had an incarcerated parent, you were just as bad or rotten as the parent. Participants described an external message

that they were not good enough to keep the incarcerated parent out of prison. Society engages in magical thinking that places pressure on the participants. Society places more burden and control on the participants than they actually have in relation to controlling the parent's actions. Because of this burden, participants felt ashamed to have an incarcerated parent and felt the need to keep it a secret. This burden and shame connected to stigma increased the participant's feelings of isolation and being misunderstood. Participants were judged for who their parents were and not for who they were as individuals. An impact of societal attitudes on the internal sense of self brings the internal experience of shame to the forefront of the experience. To combat the shame and stigma felt, participants used a variety of defenses to ward off these feelings. This shame and stigma influenced participants to be the "good girl or boy," as if to say to society, "I am different from my incarcerated parent." Therefore societal attitudes and the internal sense of shame influenced the participant's choices to a great degree in the effort to differentiate him- or herself from the parent. As will be explored later, these messages impact the mourning process and made it more complicated.

Essential others. The participant narratives highlighted the importance of others and the vital role they play in psychological health. Participants described the important role that friends, extended family, other compensatory figures, and the researcher played in their psychological lives.

Psychologically, having another person to talk to about one's experience was important for these participants. Participants described just how lonely, ashamed, and helpless they felt with a parent in prison. Participants described how their peer group was

experienced as a lifeline. Friendship combated loneliness. Friends fulfilled unfilled psychological functions. Jeremiah described a group that did this exact thing:

Yeah, you know, the group had when it first started, it was like we have a little family meeting, it was like my own little gang where I can talk to them and they are not going to judge me or say anything, or say we are not going to hear about that, because they had their own problems too. So you put all them problems together, in the end we trying to find the solution now of what we all can do that um, will help us through the situation. And so you know, my counselor tell me he was like, write down your daily activities, how you feel, and you tell your brother how you feel about him um, catching the case and stuff like that.

As will be explored later, it is developmentally appropriate that peer relationships start to become more important during adolescence as a person individuates from his or her parents and starts to internalize parental functions. However, this process looks different when a parent is imprisoned, since that parent is not physically available to the adolescent during this process. Therefore, this process occurs faster with the incarcerated parent. Regardless of how fast this process occurred, participants described the importance of friends, especially the ones who were privy to the information about the incarcerated parent, as a source of support. Thus, participants turned to peer relationships where their twinship self object needs were developed in a compensatory fashion in response to the disruptions described in the parent-child dynamic. They provided an ear that the participant to voice their frustrations and sadness as well as be a person who could help them figure out how to proceed. This investment in peers was important the participant's developing self because one needs twinship self object dynamics of the

compensatory relationships to build structure around self-confidence, self-esteem, etc. Upon reflection, participants indicated how important friendship was and if they could go back to adolescence, they would have picked their peers more wisely. This sentiment points to the to the incorporation of the experience into one's life and the knowledge that peers and the group one surrounds themselves with (whether positive or negative influences) plays a large role in life. This message was apparent to the participants when reflecting on what landed their parent in prison. Destiny described coming to this realization: "Start, stop taking everything so personal; you can be close to someone without being close to him or her. Being selective with who your real friends are, compared to who your associates are." Therefore, acknowledgement, upon reflection, of how influential peers were during the phenomenon underscores the importance of filling the self object functions in an effort to build a cohesive self.

Participants identified the importance of having extended family members to surviving the experience. For the participants who had dysfunctional subsequent parents, extended family members were important to the physical and psychological survival of the experience. These participants described how a grandparent, aunt, or uncle provided interactions with them that allowed them to feel as if they were provided for, loved, and supported. This acknowledgement and investment allowed these participants to feel as if there was a place for them to feel secure and trust someone in the world. The extended family member's presence for these participants was life-giving and allowed for some self-cohesion; otherwise these participants would have decompensated. Extended family members protected participants from the extra burdens placed on them by subsequent parents or society. This protection allowed the participants to be adolescents and have a

sense of freedom that they did not previously have in their living arrangements. Extended family members provided a protective buffer against external pressures and provided attunement that allowed the participants to continue to develop.

Compensatory figures were important to the participant's understanding and psychological survival of the overall experience. As will be explained in a later section, compensatory figures are important during adolescence development as adolescents disengage from their parents in an effort to internalize parental functions. During this time compensatory figures become important in combating loneliness and finding one's self. These compensatory figures were described as teachers, coaches, mentors, bosses, pastors, older friends, and extended family members. Jeremiah described how important his compensatory figures were back then and now:

And that is what I do, I normally go speak to somebody or, you know, or I set up at Bible studies at the church, tell them the situation and what's going on, and the majority of people say we are just pray on the situation, you know, do something to keep my mind focused. And that's normally what I do, that is how I get through my day, you know, routine, it is speaking to others about it, especially the youth, because now you know there is not a lot of leaders out there and a lot of people, little kids getting locked up or killed for no reason.

Compensatory figures become even more important for development when an adolescent had an incarcerated parent because they helped participants to integrate the experience and continue their development. Participants described feeling connected with society and non-stigmatizing groups through these figures. These compensatory figures allowed themselves to be idealized and could provide admiration of the participant's

skills in a way that others could not for the participants. Compensatory figures helped participants increase their sense of self and self-esteem by investing in the participants and helping them invest in themselves. These relationships allowed participants a chance to understand their sense of agency and see how they could make a difference in the world.

Surprisingly, the researcher played an important role in the participant's experience. Participants described how good it felt to have someone who was interested in them and did not judge them for their experience. Participant narratives indicated that the researcher became an idealized figure for the participants. The researcher wondered if her potential doctoral degree influenced the participants to view her as more knowledgeable about everything. The participants who had integrated the experience and took an altruistic stance used the researcher in a different way. These participants engaged the researcher in a twinship experience because both parties wanted to help others and create something good out of the pain of the experience. As stated before, Trinity used the researcher in yet another different way. Trinity experienced her parents' incarceration as traumatic and needed to morph the researcher into someone less scary and powerful, like a family member, to allow herself the ability to talk about the experience. Trinity seemed to experience vulnerability, anger, and ambivalence that threatened her fragile sense of self, which influenced her use of the researcher. Morphing the researcher was a result of the psychical compromise made between two competing desires of not talking about the experience and wanting to understand it.

This section impresses upon the reader the importance of social relationships to many different people during this phenomenon. The developmental needs of the

adolescent and the phenomenon's experience are at odds with each other thus making one's relationships more important in helping the adolescent process the experience and fighting stigma and isolation.

Finding #4: Spiritual impact of parental incarceration. Religion and belief in God influence how adolescents experience the phenomenon. Loss, trauma, and development are explored because of their connection and intersection with religion.

Religion. Religion was an important part for most of the participants' experiences. Religion and belief in a higher power provided the participants with a way to organize their experience. More than one participant indicated that religion prescribes a way to deal with loss. No participant indicated that his or her religion had a prescribed way to handle the phenomenon of parental incarceration. However, participants found comfort and guidance through their religion and faith. Therefore, the lessons from their faith and their belief in a caring higher power helped many participants process their experience. Developmentally, adolescence is a time when lessons and morals from the church are internalized in an effort to become self-regulating. The study's participants were no different than others in this regard. Moreover, participants described religion to be an organizer of the experience since it set out rules that could be interpreted to fit different scenarios. Religion also provided a built-in community with support that participants described gaining strength from. Destiny described that she knew she was never alone since she believed in God. Even though physically she might be alone, she was not alone in the experience because God was present and provided strength. Therefore, even though there was no delineated step-by-step method to follow, religion provided connection and strength that allowed the participants who believed in God to feel safe enough to process

their experience. It is not surprising that religion is such a powerful psychological organizer of this experience because of adolescent development and its tasks of internalizing morals, figuring out one's identity, and the drive to find an accepting community outside of the family.

God, trauma, and agency. Boulanger (2007) describes how for people who have experienced trauma their sense of agency is affected. The author describes how, on the one hand, some traumatized people allow God to take credit for actions because their sense of agency is wounded (Boulanger, 2007 p. 84). Allowing God to take credit for actions is considered a defensive action against the self feeling vulnerable. On the other hand, for some people who have experienced trauma, the trauma disrupts belief in a higher power (Herman, 1992). Not only does it take agency away from an individual, but also individuals have a hard time believing in a God that would sanction this kind of pain. However, the study's participants who were religious did not describe their experience of religion, regardless of trauma, in the same way. The study's participants indicated that faith and religion were organizers of the experience. This difference is due to the relationships and connection that a faith community offered the study's participants. Faith communities provided a place where they felt connected, built trusting relationships, and found compensatory figures to help with the integration of the entire experience.

Religion and the belief in a higher power bring organization to those who experience this disorienting phenomenon. This phenomenon's type of loss and/or trauma does not challenge one's faith as it does in other situations. Therefore, adolescent development and the accepting community religion presents outweigh the potential effects trauma has on faith.

Finding #5: Levels of adaptation. As stated previously in the structural analysis section, there are three key variables that influence the adolescent's integration and adaptation to the world after the phenomenon of a parent going to prison. There were three distinct experiences in relation to the interplay between the three key variables. The first experience involves the individual receiving the truth, having a secure relationship with the incarcerated parent, and having a functional subsequent parent. The second experience involves not finding the truth, having a relationship with the incarcerated parent, and not having a functional subsequent parent. The third and last experience involves finding the truth, but having no relationship with either the incarcerated parent or the subsequent parent.

The study found that when participants had the truth, had a supported relationship with the incarcerated parent, and had support and attunement from a subsequent parent and others, they were more likely to function better. Connection that is authentic and truthful fosters an environment where trust can grow. When there is more trust in the relationship, the less disruptive disconnections or disagreements were with the incarcerated or subsequent parent. Having trust, truth, and an attuned relationship with individuals helped participants learn that they have agency in the situation because they were able to ask questions and receive answers. They learned that supportive connections and getting the truth empowers them to fight the shame and stigma felt in the experience. Having supportive parents and the truth armed the participants with a conviction and understanding that is contrary to societal beliefs. Support and truth helped participants integrate both good and bad aspects of the experience. Therefore, these participants engaged in fewer defenses to manage the experience because they had a more integrated

sense of themselves and others. With a strong sense of themselves, participants were able to fight against other people's perceptions without becoming overwhelmed or taking things personally. Thus, the more stability one had in one's relationship with parents, the more stable and integrated one's life and experience was. Therefore, the members of this group have a high level of adaptation since they have integrated the experience, have stability in relationships, and have a strong sense of themselves that allows them to interact with the world less defensively.

The second experience is the one in which the participant does not get the truth but did have a relationship with the incarcerated parent although not with the subsequent parent. These participants have a different experience of the world. These participants desperately wanted answers, so much so that they stayed connected to their incarcerated parent in hopes that they would someday hear the truth. These participants experienced disconnection and disruption in relation to subsequent parents. The subsequent parent struggled to be attuned to the participant however other select figures, such as teachers, were attuned. Therefore, these participants struggled with feelings of helplessness, because neither parent ever consistently validated their sense of agency. There were instances where other people, such as the incarcerated parent, thwarted their attempts at agency. These participants were more influenced by societal messages, stigma, and shame because they did not have answers to their questions or a strong and honest relationship with either parent. The parent's strength and ability to share the truth strongly influences the participant's ability to integrate the experience and fight stigma. This group has less integration of the experience than the first group, but has slightly more integration and support compared to the last group. This second group struggles

with fully integrating good and bad and the overall experience. Therefore, this group engages defenses to help manage the experience and the disruption felt in the outer world, as well as in the internal world. However, when the members of this group found compensatory others that could step in for dysfunctional parents, they gained something from these figures that was previously missing. The attunement and attention from these stable compensatory others helped this group create order in their experience that was previously not there.

The last distinct experience involves participants who were told the truth, but did not have a relationship with either the incarcerated parent or the subsequent parent. These participants experienced overwhelming emotions of anxiety, anger, and sadness but were left to deal with them on their own. These emotions were disruptive to the participant's experience, as well as to the integration of the phenomenon. The disruption and overwhelming nature of the experience led to the use of major defenses, and sometimes in a primitive fashion, to prevent further decompensation. These participants experienced as much disorganization internally as they did externally with the experience. These participants experienced helplessness and a lack of agency in the experience because they struggled to marshal internal and external resources to help them organize the experience. They experienced so many disruptions and lack of constant attunement that disorganization was all they experienced of the phenomenon. Because of the disorganization and defenses employed, they struggled to fight stigma and shame, which further isolated them from others and the real connection that would help create integration. This group had the lowest level of adaptation out of the three groups.

Thus, overall the three key variables have a real influence in determining the individual's ability to adapt during and after the phenomenon of having an incarcerated parent. On a psychological level, truth and connection are important to the level of integration and disorganization felt. The three key variables influence the overall level of adaptation to the real world and the person's ability to function in the face of stigma, loss, trauma, and shame.

Theoretical implication #1: Loss. As stated previously, the phenomenon is experienced as a loss. The loss process has many implications for psychological development depending on the influence of the trauma process and attachment. This section looks at the mourning process and development as to how it pertains to this type of loss. This section will expand on the theoretical role loss plays within this phenomenon.

As some participants explicitly stated, the experience of having an incarcerated parent is experienced as a loss. Loss has traditionally been thought of through the frame of death or divorce. As posited in the emotional experience chapter the emotional experience of loss due to parental incarceration is slightly different. Freud (1917) postulates in *Mourning and Melancholia* that during the mourning process an individual has to detach from the lost person and the memories of the lost individual. To mourn fully, the individual, in an attempt to keep an aspect of the person alive introjects or internalizes an aspect of the lost individual (Freud, 1917). For individuals who struggle with this whole process it is because of ambivalence towards the lost person. Anger and deep sadness that are not worked through lead to melancholia (Freud, 1917). Worden, who studied grief and mourning, believes that the mourning process is slightly different

than what Freud originally believed. Worden (2009a) believes that it is not about withdrawal from the lost object, but about a restructuring of thoughts and feelings. The restructuring process occurs in four tasks: to accept the reality of the loss; to process the pain of grief; to adjust to a world without the deceased; and to find an enduring connection (Worden, 2009a). Although Worden (2009a) conceptualizes the four tasks using death, he acknowledged that his framework could be used with losses other than death. So if part of the mourning process includes finding connection with the lost object what does this process look like when the person has to connect to a person that society states is bad? Participant narratives showed that participants who had a functional subsequent parent who allowed for an unencumbered relationship with the incarcerated parent, and who had contact with the incarcerated parent, were able to transcend the mourning process less hindered by uncertainty and ambivalence. These participants were able to make sense of the parent's actions by asking questions and finding out answers. These answers allowed the participants a chance to grieve and adjust to life without the incarcerated parent present. The participants who struggled to integrate society's messages and grieve the loss of their parent got stuck in ambivalence towards the parent. These participants were less supported in their loss, more often had dysfunctional subsequent parents, did not visit the incarcerated parent, and the incarcerated parent was not amendable to changing or having an honest conversation. These participants described how lonely and overwhelmed they felt by the experience since they had no one else to help process the experience. Many of the participants who got stuck in ambivalence and loss defended against their emotions because they did not have the internal structure to deal with them.

When compared to other losses such as death or divorce, the loss of an incarcerated parent is different. In death, the loss of a parent is final. In divorce, for most children, the loss of the parent is connected to not seeing them every day. In parental incarceration, unless there are visits, an individual does not see the parent and there is no guarantee that the parent will get out of prison alive. However, participants described feeling a deep pain and loss. They wondered if the pain would have been less painful if they had lost their parent to death. Although Worden was referring to loss from death, the same assumption works with loss to incarceration: "Loss challenges one's fundamental life values and philosophical beliefs" (Neimeyer 2000, 2001, as cited in Worden, 2009a, p. 48). Some participants described getting to see the incarcerated parent, but other participants did not. Depending on the crime the parent was convicted of, participants had to deal with potentially not ever seeing their parent outside of prison because of a life sentence. To make matters more complex, with this loss participants have to deal with societal messages that state the parent should be punished.

As stated earlier, this loss has a different set of emotions experienced in comparison to other losses due to the complicated nature of the loss. Participants' descriptions indicated that they did not feel like society experienced their loss as a loss. Participants felt that society gave them the message that they were better off without the "bad" influence in their lives. Participants did not experience the parent's incarceration in this way; participants felt like victims too. The criminal justice system does not take their lives into account when handing down a court sentence. These participants described a foreshortened future without his or her incarcerated parent. Incarceration as a loss takes away many things from the participants: the parent; psychological functions provided by

the parent; the participant's sense of freedom and choice; faith that others will protect them (parent, government, and others); connection; and, for some participants, their sense of identity. Every participant described feeling vulnerable because he or she had lost so many of the above aspects. Participants who acknowledged and did not defend against this feeling were psychologically in better shape since they were trying to understand it and make changes in their lives. The participants who struggled with vulnerability and ambivalence towards their incarcerated parent defended against their feelings. They were less psychologically healthy because their use of major defenses and compromised processing of their loss. These participants' psychological development got derailed. They engaged in more rigid thinking and actions to defend against overwhelming emotions and anxieties. These participants were found to have little to no support or connection to subsequent parents or others who could help them compared to their more psychologically healthy counterparts. These participants were stuck in their ambivalent feelings towards the incarcerated parent and were left with many unanswered questions that impacted their identity process.

Traumatic loss and its connection to the phenomenon are explored in a later section. Processing trauma and loss supersedes continued psychological development. Development is explored in depth in a later section, but it is important to acknowledge the many processes at work. Physical development does not stop, regardless of the individual's ability to process the trauma or loss. Psychological development is different because of the use of defenses. Therefore, if a person does not process trauma or loss, that person will interact with the world from the psychological place where development derailed. For psychological health, it is important for an individual to process loss or

trauma, since these things impact not only psychological growth but also one's ability to learn at school and function in the real world. The participants that were psychologically healthier than others in the study were the ones who had a chance to process loss and trauma with the help of a functional subsequent parent and others that helped them identify, know, and create a narrative around the loss and/or trauma. Creating a space for one to discuss the experience openly with others allowed for a narrative to develop and support to be felt. Safety, support, and having a narrative are important aspects of processing loss and trauma. Therefore, connection to others, finding out the truth, and having the ability to talk about the experience allows for trauma and loss to be processed so that psychological development can continue.

Throughout the participant interviews, it became clear that this phenomenon was not just one loss, but that there are many losses connected to it. As stated previously, there are many losses that happen because of financial reasons. Each participant experienced the losses differently, but psychologically there were similarities. Participants described that losing the parent to incarceration stirred up past losses, such as an immediate or extended family member's death. Many losses in a row overwhelmed and incapacitated the participants, further breaking their vulnerable sense of self.

As other participants described the splitting up of their families, it was clear that the support, familiarity, and sense of normalcy that helps families and individuals get through the initial stages of a loss were not available to these families for various economic reasons. Participants described how sad, depressed, isolated, and overwhelmed they were after having to make many changes that they had no control over. Jeremiah described how his family made the difficult choice to split up. His mother sat his

immediate family down and had a frank discussion about the family's options. Jeremiah's mother allowed her children a sense of agency and a voice in the decision. Although Jeremiah described how difficult this process was on his family, the choices they made were in the interest of what was best for them at that time. This can be seen in comparison to other participants who described having no say in the subsequent parent's decision to move. For these participants, their sense of agency was stunted and not fully internalized. These participants tended to describe the world as happening to them. Psychologically it did not matter whether one had multiple losses or just one; what mattered was how the losses were engaged with, processed, and understood. The participants who had a functional and attuned subsequent parent fared better than participants who did not have a functional subsequent parent when it came to understanding their loss. The parent's love, support, and help allowed the participant to weather difficult times and feel as if he or she had personal agency and influence in his or her lives. This support and the ability to talk with others with the same experience gave participants a community that understood what they were going through and allowed them to express what was on their minds without judgment from others. This peer or community support was critical for development and not to feel isolated.

This section looked at the loss process during the phenomenon of parental incarceration. The loss process can get interrupted and trumped by trauma. Both can have a large impact on psychological development if not attended to. Freud and Worden's work on loss and mourning is helpful in understanding what the process should look like if the person is supported in their loss. This section helps the reader better understand the complexity of loss within the phenomenon of parental incarceration.

Theoretical implication #2: Trauma. As stated previously, some adolescents experience this phenomenon as traumatic. Like loss, trauma has many implications on psychological development depending on the influence of the loss process and attachment. This section uses a different definition of trauma that is all-inclusive. The rest of this section covers the following: the difference between trauma in childhood and in adults, traumatic loss, trauma's temporality, and integration of trauma. This section is a theoretical discussion of the intersection between trauma and the phenomenon of parental incarceration.

Before preceding any further, trauma should be defined. There is no all-encompassing definition of trauma. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition (DSM-5), defines trauma or a traumatic stressor to be the following: any event (or events) that may cause or threaten death, serious injury, or sexual violence to an individual, a close family member, or a close friend (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). However, if this definition is used, the DSM-5 excludes and invalidates the experience of the study's participants. Freud (1966) defines trauma and traumatic as the following: "'traumatic'...we apply [this term] to an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way" (p. 340-341). Freud's definition of trauma is more inclusive and therefore allows the subjective experience to dictate whether an event or experience was considered traumatic. To further define trauma, Horowitz (1976a) identifies eight common subjective responses to trauma and stress: fear of repetition; shame over helplessness or emptiness; rage at the source of the trauma; guilt or shame over aggressive impulses; survivor guilt; fear of aggressively

acting out; fear of identification or merger with victims; and sadness in relation to the loss. Horowitz's (1976a) eight subjective responses to stress were seen in the experiences of the study's participants. Therefore, this study's definition of trauma is a hybrid of Freud's conceptualization of trauma with Horowitz's subjectivities of trauma. These definitions get at the essence of the traumatic experience of this phenomenon.

As seen in the results section, this phenomenon can be and was experienced as traumatic for some participants. This phenomenon can also be considered a traumatic loss. The National Childhood Traumatic Stress Network website (n.d.) describes traumatic loss as a combination of grief and trauma. The trauma symptoms interfere with the child's ability to continue on the typical bereavement process. Worden's (2009b) work supports this assertion and takes it one step further. Trauma and its experience take precedence over processing the loss and normal development. Therefore trauma and its symptoms need to be dealt with first before other processes can continue (Worden, 2009b). This type of experience became evident through descriptions of avoidance defenses in an effort to not think about the incarcerated parent or the loss. Other participants described memories of different parts of the experience that were never fully processed. Many participants described a perception of time stopping, which seared a particular moment in time into their brain. Whether it was a parent being arrested, a toy being taken away from the participant by the parent, or recounting how one watched another family member die, they described trying to avoid these reminders or memories. For participants that described trauma connected to the parent's incarceration, it highlighted just how vulnerable the phenomenon leaves the family; how insecure participants felt; and how other people helped or did not help them sort out their

experience. For some participants, their subsequent parent or extended family members helped the participant feel safe and secure enough to allow the participant's trauma to be processed and the grief process to continue. Participants who were left to try to make sense of the trauma and grief on their own were still struggling with their trauma and grief as adults. The system is doing more damage than repair to some families. A few participants shared that they went to therapy during their adolescence. These participants described the therapeutic process as life-giving because it helped them incorporate and deal with the trauma and loss. Unfortunately, most people do not get connected to therapy during this process because the criminal justice system is not set up to support it.

One's sense of temporality changes due to trauma. Participant memories and their lack of integration occur for two reasons. First, the mind's cognitive processing of the event gets overwhelmed by the significance of the trauma as well as the trauma not fitting into one's experience of the world. Therefore, until the trauma can be worked into one's cognitive schema, the traumatic memory is not incorporated (Horowitz, 1976b). What makes integration possible is creating a context or relationship that allows for the painful, stressful, and traumatic experience to be expressed (Stolorow, 2007). Stolorow (2007) states that if the experience does not find a place to become textualized into one's experience, the trauma and its emotional experience will continue to be split off, out of the mind's awareness but not out of the body's awareness. Therefore symptoms will appear and functioning will be compromised until the trauma is dealt with.

Compared to adults, trauma and the traumatic experiences are processed differently in children. In children, trauma is folded into different self states and becomes part of the personality structure (Boulanger, 2007). Thus the trauma becomes part of the

constellation called the self; whereas trauma when it occurs in adulthood collapses the self (Boulanger, 2007). Therefore, the traumatic experience, if not dealt with, could influence symptoms or get dissociated off in an effort to protect the self from fragmenting (Boulanger, 2007).

As stated elsewhere, to integrate trauma into one's narrative, it has to be done in the context of a safe relationship. Although the researcher did not set out to help integrate trauma, the interview process began to do just that. The interviews gave participants who had traumatic stories a chance to share their story safely to someone who did not have any agenda. The participants who had never been to therapy described the interview process as a place where they got to think about the experience in a new way. Some participants were drawn to this study in hopes that they could process their trauma and loss more. At the end of the interview process participants discussed thinking about their experience in a new way and how it allowed them to think about it from a new perspective. These statements indicated that some participants were able to incorporate and integrate some of the emotions, thoughts, or ideas that they had not been able to deal with before. As stated earlier, when trauma is incorporated into the narrative, it takes the power away from the overwhelming experience, allows for mastery, and increases agency over a previously unintegrated experience. Participants felt as though they had more control over the aforementioned aspects by the end of the interviews.

For trauma to be integrated there are a few things that need to happen. Connections to self, to community, and to caregivers are the most important building blocks of all to integration (Boulanger, 2007; Herman, 1992; Slade, 2013; Stolorow, 2007; Stolorow, 2011). By rebuilding trust that is broken by the traumatic experience, a

person can combat the feelings of guilt, shame, and inferiority with the help of close relationships (Herman, 1992). Relationships with trusted others help the participants fight the fear of the loss, annihilation, and psychic emptiness that is felt in connection to traumatic experiences (Slade, 2013). Within the context of an attuned relationship a narrative that includes the traumatic experience can create integration, meaning, and a sense of control over one's experience (Boulanger, 2007; Herman, 1992; Slade, 2013; Stolorow, 2007; Stolorow, 2011).

The participants who had functional subsequent parents that titrated the experience for them did not experience the traumatic aspects of the experience with the frequency that the other participants did. Participants who did not have the support or truth about the incarcerated parent's situation had more difficulty processing the entire experience on their own. This phenomenon is not one that an individual can handle on his or her own. To process a parent's incarceration, a person needs relationships.

This section stresses the importance of identifying trauma from this phenomenon. Because of the current DSM-5 definition and societal messages, the trauma from the experience of parental incarceration can be hard to identify. Trauma and temporality are very isolating, going against the very remedy for the problem. Therefore connection to relationships, trust, and creating a narrative is so important for the adolescents that experience the phenomenon of parental incarceration.

Theoretical implication #3: Development. Adolescent development and psychological development are influenced by loss, trauma, and attachment in relation to the phenomenon. This section looks at the adolescent developmental tasks of individuating from parents, interacting with peers, and reflecting on experiences as

influenced by the phenomenon of parental incarceration. This section is a theoretical discussion of this intersection.

Development can be thought of in many ways. This section is a discussion about psychological development and its implications on the participants' narratives and lives. When a parent is incarcerated the psychological experience can be complicated and complex. Depending on the age of the child, there are many processes going on that could compete with each other. If the experience was traumatic for the individual, he or she is dealing with trauma and its demons. The experience of a parent being incarcerated is also experienced as a loss. And last but not least, the individual is still developing; therefore the developmental process is still in play. Thus there are potentially three different processes that are trying to unfold at one time. Do any of the processes take center stage? Do they all continue on? Does one interfere with another?

When there is more than one process occurring, there is a hierarchy that emerges. Physical development continues to progress regardless of what is going on psychologically. For psychological development to occur, both trauma and loss need to be dealt with first. Trauma is processed first, before loss. The intrusive aspects of trauma need to be dealt with before one can process the pain from the loss. If either or both are not dealt with, psychological development gets derailed. Acknowledging trauma and loss can be frightening. However, if they are not dealt with, the individual will be stuck functioning at a suboptimal level because their psyche will be organized around the trauma or loss.

The developmental stage the study looked at was adolescence. Blos (1967) calls this stage the second individuation. This term indicates that at this time of development

the individual is starting to become his or her own individual. This process entails a certain level of separation from one's parents and a change of location of functions from the parent to the adolescent. During this phase, the adolescent is creating a sense of self and identity; self-regulating emotions and esteem; moving from parents to peers, culminating in intimate partner relationships; internalizing moral standards; and decreasing reliance on parents (Kaplan, 1991; Lidz, 1983). Even though they are readjusting their relationship to their parents, adolescents still need to have the parent present for this process to occur. Another aspect that the adolescent is incorporating at this stage of development is the capacity for reflection and mentalization (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002b).

Psychological development in adolescence demands that an individual slowly deidealizes one's parents over the course of one's adolescence. This deidealization then gets internalized into a more realistic image of the parent (Kaplan, 1991; Lidz, 1983). Through this slow process a void appears from decoupling from the parent, and the adolescent attempts to fill the void with compensatory figures. These compensatory figures can take many forms. The study's participants described figures from academics, faith communities, work, friends, coaches, and other family members. These compensatory figures were more important for adolescents who have an incarcerated parent, since the slow developmental process was circumvented and the loss of the parent was immediate compared to the normal process. It is also important to note that these figures become even more important for the adolescents who had an incarcerated parent and a dysfunctional subsequent parent. These figures help the individual to

psychologically survive by helping get the individual's needs met, create new attachment bonds, and provide support that will allow development to continue.

As adolescent development continues, relationships with peers and love interests become more important (Kaplan, 1991; Lidz, 1983). Although participants did not talk much about navigating love interests during their adolescence, they did talk about how important their peer relationships were. Participant narratives indicated that the process of choosing positive friends was tricky. Friendship was important for these participants not only because it is part of normal adolescent development, but also because relationships were instrumental in not feeling alone in the experience. Friendship provided not only a person with whom to face each day's challenges, with but also someone that could empathize with the participant's experience and fulfill the needs of admiration, love, and security for the participants.

Some participant narratives described situations in which participants got stuck in their psychological development even though physical development continued. Adolescents can get stuck in any one of the many tasks laid out previously (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002a; Kaplan, 1991; Lidz, 1983). The pressure from trying to incorporate these functions can aggravate preexisting problems or lead to a breakdown because of insufficient internalized psychic structure and the environment's lack of support (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002a). These participants got stuck in the aspects of loss or trauma from the experience. They tended to experience the world with more fear and anxiety about people's actions and intentions. For some participants, it was because they had to become pseudo-mature due to the lack of subsequent parenting or adequate people within their world to help them make sense of the experience and the

world. For other participants, ambivalence and anxiety about who they were in relation to their incarcerated parents as it informs their identity was where they got stuck. There could be many places where people could get stuck in the experience; however, it depends on when the parent went to prison, if the person was able to see the parent in prison, and how the aspects of loss and trauma were dealt with.

As the reader can see, this section is about adolescent development. For adolescents to transcend age-appropriate developmental tasks, parents need to be present. However, this phenomenon impacts not only the adolescent but also both parents' ability to be present for the adolescent. Not only do loss and trauma impede development, but also the availability of an attuned parent or compensatory figure influences development. Thus, there are many things that influence development during this phenomenon.

Theoretical implication #4: Attachment. As posited elsewhere, attachment is a perspective from which to explore the phenomenon of parental incarceration. This section explores in depth the intersection of attachment and parental incarceration and its effects on attachment and relationships. Over the decades since John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, there have been advances in the concept of attachment. Following in the footsteps of attachment theorists before them, Arietta Slade, Peter Fonagy, and David Wallin have made influential contributions to attachment theory. Slade, Fonagy, and Wallin's contributions allow the reader to better understand the role of fear, mentalization, and attachment styles as they pertain to having an incarcerated parent.

Participant narratives indicated that during the arrest, sentencing, and then prison phases, Bowlby's (1973b) three stages of separation and loss explain the participant's experience. Many participants described their initial reaction of protest to the parent

being arrested and jailed (Bowlby, 1973b). Participants could not believe that the parent was gone or that they would be gone for long. Many participants described fears and anxiety about losing the parent and wondering if the parent was okay. The participants described, after they heard the conviction, how sad they were about the parent's absence. The participant's hopes of a speedy return home for their parent were dashed. This phase is what Bowlby (1973b) calls despair, which was a good description of what these participants felt. Lastly, in an attempt to move on and manage the loss, participants described how they used their defenses to manage the pain they felt, as well as to detach from the incarcerated parent since he or she would not be in their life in the same way he or she used to be. This is very similar to how Bowlby (1973b) describes the phase of detachment and defense.

Although Bowlby's work touched on fear, Arietta Slade took the baton and continued to explore fear's place in attachment. Slade (2014) identifies fear as a central affect that organizes attachment and psychic experience. The remedy for fear and its subclasses of fear of loss, annihilation, and psychic emptiness are relationships (Slade, 2013; Slade, 2014). To understand fear and be able to face it comes in the context of a safe and attuned relationship. Children and adolescents will adapt to the parent and relationship to maintain closeness in an effort to survive (Slade, 2014). Therefore, the adolescent will use different methods of attention-seeking and defenses to stay close to a parent. The caregiver's ability to handle and face the threat impacts the adolescent's closeness and attachment (Slade, 2014). As Slade (2014) states, the child adapts to the parent's ability; therefore, the less flexible and more defensive the parent is, the more insecure the attachment is to the parent. From this perspective, what distinguishes the insecure

attachment from others is the degree, intensity, and relational quality of the threat the adolescent faces (Slade, 2014). As these adolescents become adults, those who do not have a secure attachment and ways to manage their fear will relate in one of the following ways: the avoidantly attached individual will choose autonomy over relationships with others; the individual with a preoccupied attachment will choose fraught relationships over autonomy; and lastly, the individual with a disorganized attachment will find no safety in either relationships or their own autonomy (Slade, 2013).

Slade's contributions of fear and its place in attachment were seen throughout the participant narratives. The reader can identify and almost feel the fear and anxiety some of the participants described feeling during the experience. It comes as no surprise that the participants in whom the reader could most easily perceive their fear and anxiety were left to their own devices by their subsequent parents to handle and make sense of the experience. Therefore, these participants had to defend against these feelings and the experience in order to stay close to the subsequent parent.

Beyond Slade, other aspects of attachment theory were affected by parental incarceration. Peter Fonagy and his research team worked on ideas such as the theory of mind and how adults use theory of mind to understand their own mental states, as well as the mental states of others (Wallin, 2007). Theory of mind is defined as the following: "an interconnected set of beliefs and desires attributed to explain a person's behavior" (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002a, p. 26). This concept helps one further understand the mentalizing and reflective capacities. Mentalizing is defined as "imaginatively perceiving and interpreting behavior of oneself and others as conjoined with intentional mental states" (Allen, Fonagy, & Bateman, 2008, p. 348). Before a

person can mentalize there has to be reflection. Fonagy's work on reflective capacity shows how one's capacity to reflect is related to the ability to empathize and create insights into ourselves and others (Wallin, 2007). Fonagy further explored and described three subjective modes connected to one's reflective and mentalizing capacities: psychic equivalence, pretense, and mentalizing (Wallin, 2007, p. 46). Psychic equivalence, Fonagy believed, was the mode in which the individual's internal world and external reality are equated, and therefore there is little to no difference between beliefs, fact, and experience (Wallin, 2007, p. 47). Fonagy's second mode is that of pretense. In this mode, one's external reality and internal world are experienced as separate and not integrated with each other. Therefore, defenses such as denial and dissociation are frequently used (Wallin, 2007, p. 47). Finally Fonagy's last mode is the mentalizing mode, which is also known as the reflective mode. In this mode, the person is able to acknowledge that one's external reality and internal reality are separate but influenced by each other, by one's affect, and by the abilities to think, feel, and reflect (Wallin, 2007, p. 47). Fonagy felt that an individual's ability to be reflective is grounded in one's ability to regulate one's affect (Wallin, 2007). This ability to regulate one's affect is influenced by the parent's ability for and awareness in mirroring and developing this regulation within the relationship (Wallin, 2007).

These subjective modes were seen in the participant narratives. The more trauma and loss one experiences without processing it, the lower the subjective mode used. Some participants whose subsequent parents struggled to help their adolescent integrate the experience used the pretense mode to function on a daily basis. Participants who had

functional and attuned subsequent parents that were able to help the adolescent integrate the experience fostered the reflective mode.

This ability to regulate one's affect helps define not only childhood attachment, but also adult attachment. Children "borrow" or use the same modes of attachment, affect regulation, and modes of interacting as parents do, thus borrowing their parent's defenses (Fonagy et al., 1995, as cited in Wallin, 2007). Discussion of attachment styles includes differences in capacities and their intersection with the study participants' experiences. The following adult attachments will be explored: secure, dismissing, preoccupied, and unresolved.

For securely attached adults, their experience over the course of their childhood and adulthood was consistent, regulated, and attuned to by their caregivers. Individuals who have this kind of attachment did not have perfect parents, but had parents who repaired misattuned experiences. These "rupture and repair" experiences helped the adolescent, over the course of development, learn how to regulate their own affect and experience. These individuals had parents who could balance the adolescent's needs for attachment, exploration, and relatedness (Wallin, 2007). Through these repeated experiences the individual slowly learned how to self-monitor, regulate their own affect, think critically, and reflect on their experiences.

Adults who relate using a dismissing form of attachment were seen to have had an avoidant attachment in childhood. These individuals have a severely constricted sense of self-awareness that serves to defend against feelings and remembering or thinking about certain thoughts or emotions (Wallin, 2007). With this kind of adult attachment, these individuals have an overestimation of their own abilities and feel as if they do not need

support and connection to others thus indicating that the individual's needs in childhood were not attended to. This individual learned to fulfill their self-absorbed parent's needs in an attempt to defend against one's own needs. A sense of control and agency is important to this individual because his or her parent used him or her for his or her own needs (Wallin, 2007). Once he or she became aware that the parent was treating him or her in this way, the adolescent tried to resist the parent's control, which was then perpetuated in other relationships (Wallin, 2007). This type of attachment also perpetuates feelings of isolation and being different, which are continually defended against. These individuals felt as though they were emotionally left alone to deal with the experience and in an effort to handle it, they downregulated their emotions and experiences (Sroufe, 1996 as cited in Fonagy, 2001) to minimize their experience and emotions. These participants described their relationships with friends as being few and far between.

The next adult attachment style is the preoccupied attachment. These adults as children showed ambivalent attachment. For this individual, his or her internal experience is filled with self-doubt and fear that one will become too independent from his or her parent. Therefore, these individuals struggle to believe that they are strong enough to rely on themselves without the parent (Wallin, 2007). During childhood, this individual had unpredictable parents who were unreliable with attunement; thus, these adolescents heightened their needs in order to get them met (Wallin, 2007). These adolescents and adults use what Sroufe called up-regulating emotions and experiences, which is to activate their attachment system in a way that amplifies their distress to get an adult's attention (Sroufe, 1996, as cited in Fonagy, 2001). These individuals struggle to integrate

good and bad thoughts and feelings. Their experience is driven by anxiety. For these individuals, their ability to regulate their thoughts and affect is impaired because they get too flooded and overwhelmed by them. Therefore, these individuals' actions are based on emotion and not logic. Logical thought gets lost because their emotions are so big and overwhelming that they take over any ability to think reflectively (Wallin, 2007). These individuals are so attuned to others' needs that they do not recognize and attune to their own since they do not know how to manage them effectively.

The last adult attachment style consists of the unresolved attachment. During childhood, these individuals manifested disorganized attachment. These individuals went through trauma or some overwhelming experience as a child or adolescent and no adult or parent could help them make sense of the experience. As children, these individuals had to take on a more parental role in an effort to stay connected to his or her parent (Wallin, 2007). This individual's entire experience was disowned and disavowed in an effort to stay connected with the parent. Therefore, as an adult, the individual is overwhelmed by painful experiences that he or she has no capacity or method to safely process. Therefore, the trauma of the dissociated material is frozen in time due to not being processed at all (Wallin, 2007). This lack of processing and being taught to ignore it leads these individuals to use primitive defense mechanisms in an effort to manage the traumatic material (Wallin, 2007).

The study's participants showed a wide range of adult attachments. Jeremiah and Destiny's narratives indicated secure attachment, which allowed them to integrate their emotions, thoughts, and experiences in such a way that they were able to interact with the world in a less defensive manner. Aliyah and Xavier's narratives indicated a dismissing

attitude towards attachment. Even though they had somewhat functional subsequent parents, they each downregulated their emotions and experience. This downregulation was in service of downplaying the vulnerability they felt and in an attempt to have control over their thoughts and feelings. Trinity's narrative indicated that she had a preoccupied attachment. To help her manage and understand her thoughts, feelings, and experiences, she upregulated her anxiety to get her caregivers to help her. Lastly, Vernon's narrative indicated an unresolved attachment. Vernon's description of his childhood was filled with dramatic disappointment and failures in parenting that led him to defend against his emotions and thoughts in order to manage the internal sense of disruption and to stay marginally connected with his parents.

As the reader can see, attachment plays an important role in the experience of this phenomenon. A relationship with a parent can help an individual regulate emotions and process them thus leading to the subjective modes of functioning and attachment styles. This highlights the importance of having attuned relationships with the child from the very beginning, as doing so can influence healthier functioning.

Limitations and Final Implications

This last section highlights aspects of the overall study. This study had limitations that influenced how the findings are conceptualized in the larger picture. Following the discussion of the study's limitations, there are important clinical implications and social justice implications for people who work with this population. Lastly, the section on future research describes different avenues to study.

Limitations of the study. Four out of the six participants returned for follow-up interviews. These participants stated that the study and its write-up resonated with their experience. The other two participants were contacted for a follow-up interview but never called back. The four that did do a follow-up interview expressed gratitude and interest in meeting others like themselves in a group setting. The strength of qualitative phenomenological research is that it constructs an in-depth look at the experience of the research participants. Although the in-depth view of the experience is specific to this group of research participants, it is still a meaningful set of results from which others can learn something. Phenomenological research is not interested in generalizability of an experience, but in obtaining the essence of and meaning that an individual makes of an experience (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). One possible limitation of transcendental phenomenological research is that there are other plausible explanations for or aspects of the studied phenomenon that were not considered due to the data gathered. Further research on this population and phenomenon will help detangle the complex experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence and its many impacts on the adolescent's life.

Clinical implications. An exploration of the lived experience of having an incarcerated parent during one's adolescence unearthed several clinical implications for social workers and social service agencies that work with this population. The participant narratives indicated the importance of working with this population, having informed clinicians, forming connections, healing trauma and loss, increasing agency, and promoting healthy development.

Clinical work with this population. Participant experiences of this phenomenon unearthed the need for clinicians to work with families in which a parent is or has been incarcerated. For the few participants who sought out therapy, it was reported as life-giving and very helpful. This study found that there are subgroups of this population who would benefit from services to help them process the phenomenon. The first subgroup is compromised of the adolescents whose parents are incarcerated. As we have seen, adolescence has many processes occurring at one time. To identify adolescents who have an incarcerated parent and let them know there is extra support if needed, whether they are acting out or not, lets them know that they are not alone in their experience. The second subgroup to work with is the subsequent parents. This study found that when subsequent parents were functional – i.e., attuned to the adolescent’s affect and experience – the adolescents fared better. Subsequent parents play a big role in helping the adolescent process this experience. Providing therapeutic support to subsequent parents would allow them to be more able to be there for their child. Helping subsequent parents get connected to welfare programs would also be key to helping these families survive financially. The last subgroup to work with is the family after the incarcerated parent returns home. Working with this group will help the family system identify expectations and come to realistic goals and expectations for each family member.

Informed clinicians. It is important for clinicians working with this population to be aware of many concepts. First off, it is important for the clinician to understand and know where their biases lie. Society stigmatizes this group for having an incarcerated parent. It would be prudent for all clinicians to be aware of their biases and stigma so as not to further them when engaging with this population. An informed clinician should also

know where in the criminal justice process the incarcerated parent is to be able to help the family with their experience. Clinicians should also understand the adolescent developmental tasks, loss, trauma, and attachment. These four concepts are important to understanding this phenomenon and adolescence.

Connection. Connection is an important aspect of this phenomenon. Connection to others, especially the incarcerated parents who are truthful and honest with the adolescent, helps the adolescent make sense of the phenomenon. This connection helps the adolescent ask questions and receive answers. Connection to others who have experienced the same phenomenon is important to combating isolation and stigma. Almost all participants expressed a desire to meet others like themselves. Lastly, connection to an attuned other, whether that be a subsequent parent, a compensatory figure, or a therapist, was helpful for integration of the phenomenon.

Healing trauma and loss. As stated before, this phenomenon carried aspects of trauma and loss. To help this population flourish, any clinician working with this population should keep an ear out for aspects of trauma and loss. These two concepts need to be handled before psychological development can continue. By working with trauma and loss, clinicians are helping this population make sense of their experience.

Increasing agency. Many participants indicated that they did not feel they had agency in the experience. Although the individual does not have agency in relation to the criminal justice system, there are opportunities to have agency in other aspects of their experience. By increasing their agency in small ways, members of this population can internalize the fact that they can influence the world around them and increase their self-

control and self-esteem. This increase in agency combats the helplessness felt in the phenomenon.

Healthy development. Processing the phenomenon and promoting connection to others also promotes healthy development. If one can be attached to people who help one to integrate and understand the experience, the more likely it is that one's development will not get derailed. Through integration and attunement, one can help individuals facing this phenomenon increase their reflective capacity. The stronger the capacities for regulation of emotions and reflection, the more functional the individual will be.

Social Justice Implications

There are three practical issues to keep in mind that families of incarcerated parents face. Although it may have been previously mentioned, it is important to understand how the following impact adolescent life: stigma, when a parent becomes a barrier, and the system as a whole will each be explored for their implications.

Fighting stigma. As stated before, this phenomenon invites stigma to follow families and participants. Participant narratives indicated that participants felt pressure and stigma from society. This is an area where social workers and social service agencies can help individuals and families fight against stigma through engaging communities, schools, and other individuals to describe the true pressures that these individuals and families face. Fighting the stigma will allow these individuals and families to come together out in the open and to create connections and relationships that will help strengthen the community and support for these individuals. The more support and

recognition the families of incarcerated parents have the less stigmatizing the phenomenon will be.

Parents can become a barrier. Participants described their experience of having an incarcerated parent. The parent's actions create not only stigma for the participants, but other barriers as well. Participants described the unforeseen barriers that caused frustration and headaches. An incarcerated parent can become a barrier to the participant's safety because of their actions that landed them in prison. Some participants feared for their lives due to the uncertainty of whether someone would want to retaliate in the same way. Other participants expressed the anxiety they felt or tried to ignore when going into different neighborhoods outside of their own community. Both male and female participants described having to enter neighborhoods with extreme caution because of who their parent was or who their family was. Therefore, individuals had to be careful of people or actions that had nothing to do with them. They were judged again for their parent's actions and not for their own actions or personality. These participants described having to be more vigilant about their surroundings. They also had to deal with others' immediate reactions to them and having to change opinions or preconceived notions about them. These aspects made it harder for participants to make friends or to bond with others over shared experiences.

Destiny reported that her incarcerated parent became a barrier to her future. Destiny shared that when she went to college, she found it hard to pay for it on her own. She tried to get financial aid, but it did not cover the entire cost of her schooling. She stated that she could not put her parent on her FASFA forms because her parent was a felon. This is an example of an unintended consequence of having an incarcerated parent.

The stigma connected to having an incarcerated parent does act as a barrier in many ways for the participants and their families since so many federal and state programs bar ex-felons or paroled citizens from their programs. Therefore, the family's welfare and subsidized housing would be put at risk if the incarcerated parent was talked about or was released and returned home.

The system as a whole. Many participants described how the system that was supposed to be supportive and look out for them did not feel this way. Participants described the criminal justice system, parole officers, the higher education system, and the prison system to be unsupportive and a disappointment. The system that was supposed to be there to help them was not present. Some participants described feeling as though it did the opposite, it held them down. From the participants' perspective, they felt that the system was not doing enough to support the incarcerated parents and help them get back on their feet once they were released. Participants felt that the structures that were in place to help them were overwhelmed, understaffed, and underfunded to be able to help the number of people the system held. Destiny described how she has worked hard to try to pull herself out of poverty, "and it's been hard." Destiny hit on the notion that the dominant ideology hides inequities in the system yet makes it appear as if it's an individual problem, not a systematic problem (Layton, 2006). Layton (2006) further states that the dominant ideology also dictates what the power structure looks like, therefore assigning social classes to dependent or independent classifications. Destiny did not expect to have to fight the system that was keeping her in her place. She also described her African-American community as struggling to support each other. She reported that not only in her neighborhood, but also in other economically distressed

neighborhoods, that when a low wage job becomes available there are at least ten people that apply for it. Although she joked about it, her statement gets at the very struggle and nature of the problem: jobs are hard to come by for people living in impoverished neighborhoods. She indicated that the lack of jobs and services could lead people to commit crimes to make ends meet because there are few legitimate ways to make a living. This participant was referring to the lack of solidarity and racism within the African-American community (Hirsch & Jack, 2012). Hirsch and Jack's (2012) study also found that African-Americans feel that intraracism and lack of solidarity impacts the race as a whole from achieving a better position. It is not to place the entire blame on the African-American community, but acknowledging that it plays a part in the problem.

Future Research

The lack of research on the adolescent population facing this phenomenon is astounding. Therefore, future research should look at specific adolescent tasks and how having an incarcerated parent influences these tasks. There was a tremendous amount of interest in this study by individuals who for one reason or another did not fit the study's criteria. Future research could look at different stages of life development to understand the influence of the phenomenon at different life stages. Lastly, although the possibilities are endless, future research could focus on the dyad of the incarcerated parent and the child. Potential participants and study participants indicated that this kind of research and the concurrent processing of the phenomenon with the parent would be helpful.

The previous sections presented the complex findings and implications of the phenomenon of having an incarcerated parent during one's adolescence. The

psychological, social, emotional, and spiritual impacts of parental incarceration affect the adolescent's level of adaptation. This phenomenon influenced and was experienced on many theoretical levels: loss, trauma, development, and attachment. All of these findings and implications influence the study's limitations, clinical and social justice implications, and future research. This phenomenon is just starting to be understood; therefore, more research is necessary.

Appendix A
Recruitment Flyer

HAVE YOU HAD A PARENT OR PARENTAL FIGURE INCARCERATED AND ARE WILLING TO SHARE YOUR STORY?

I am doing a research project for a dissertation in clinical social work on the individual’s experience of having a parent or parental figure incarcerated during his or her teenage years. I am seeking people:

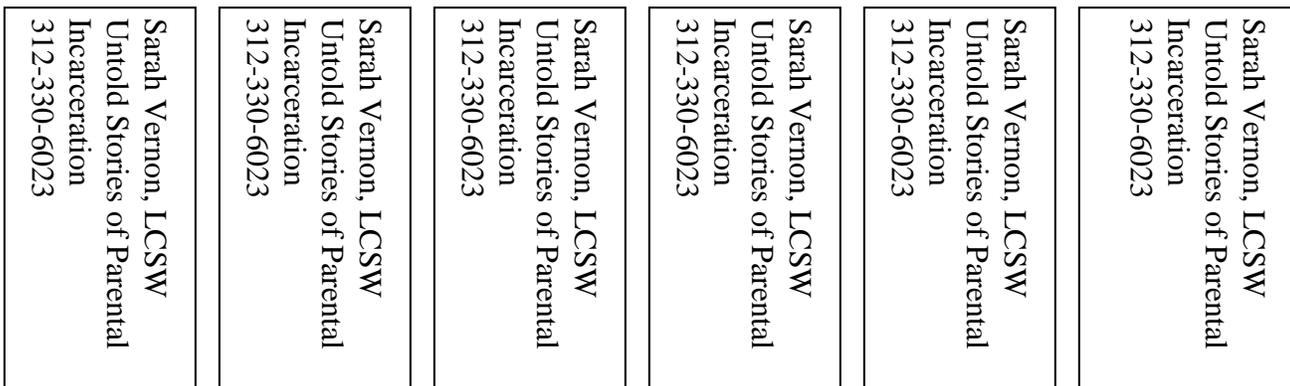
- Who are between the ages of 18 to 29,
- Have or had a parent or parental figure incarcerated during his or her teenage years (15 to 17 years old),
- The incarcerated parent or parental figure was incarcerated for at least two years,
- Lived with the incarcerated parent or parental figure for at least a month prior to the incarceration,
- Willing to be interviewed up to four times and be digitally recorded each time.

If you would like to participate please call or email me. I will come to the local community center or public library to meet with you. We will meet up to four times for about an hour and a half each time to talk about your experiences. It will be completely confidential. This is an opportunity to talk about the experience of having a parent or parental figure incarcerated in ways you might not have talked about before. I will use this research to better understand the lived experience and meanings for those who have had a parent or parental figure incarcerated during one’s teenage years. Social workers can benefit from this knowledge to better help those individuals or families experiencing parental incarceration.

For further information, please contact me at 312-330-6023 or svernon@icsw.edu.

Looking forward to talking with you!

Sarah Vernon, LCSW



HAS YOUR PARENT OR PARENTAL FIGURE EVER BEEN INCARCERATED?

THEN YOU MIGHT QUALIFY TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Purpose of this study: This study will explore what it is like to have a parent or parental figure incarcerated during your teenage years. Participation in this study will include three 45-60 minute interviews at a local community center or public library near you.

To Participate in this study: You must be between the ages of 18 and 29; have a parent or parental figure who has been incarcerated for at least 2 years; lived with the incarcerated parent or parental figure for at least 1 month prior to the incarceration; and willing to be interviewed up to 4 times and digitally recorded each time.

Benefits of participation: Your participation will contribute to understanding the experience of having a parent or parental figure incarcerated during the teenage years. This is an opportunity to talk about the experience in ways you might not have talked about before.

Risks of participation: There are minimal risks in participating in this study. It will be completely confidential.

For your time participating in this study, you will receive a \$30 Visa gift card.

This research is being conducted by PhD candidate Sarah Vernon, LCSW, under the direction of Dr. Jim Lampe, PhD at the Institute for Clinical Social Work. This research study has been approved by the ICSW Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions, you can contact Sarah Vernon at 312-330-6023 or svernon@icsw.edu.

For further information or to volunteer, please contact me at 312-330-6023 or svernon@icsw.edu.

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Untold Stories of Parental
Incarceration
312-330-6023

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Appendix B
Script for Pre-Interviews

I appreciate you contacting me with interest in my research study. I am an LCSW and doctoral student in the clinical social work PhD program at the Institute for Clinical Social Work here in Chicago. I am planning a study looking at the experience of having a parent or parental figure incarcerated during one's teenage years. We will be considering all experiences connected to having a parent or parental figure incarcerated like how you found out about it, what was going on in your life around that time, relationships, life experiences, and changes that occurred due to the incarceration of your parent or parental figure. I am in the process of screening participants who have had a parent or parental figure incarcerated during their teenage years, to eventually find six to eight participants to participate in the research study. There will be compensation for participation at the end of each completed research interview. In gratitude for your time you will receive a \$30 Visa gift card. All participants will be given another name in the published study to assure their privacy. The research study will include interview questions of a personal nature, but participants have the option of declining any questions they prefer not to answer; these questions will be asked only in the service of putting participants' personal lives into the context of the research topic.

The research process will begin this fall, with each participant being interviewed individually and in person by me, from one to four times over the course of some months. The interviews would likely happen in a private room in a local public library or community center. All the interviews will last between 45 minutes to a one-hour and be conducted by me. The final interview is optional and will at most last 30 minutes. This final interview, if you choose, is to share the research findings. The interviews will be digitally recorded on a digital recorder. The raw data and written transcripts of your interviews will be shared between my committee chair and myself only. All digital audio files will be destroyed immediately following completion of the study. I will keep the written transcripts of your interviews on my password-protected computer for five years following the study.

I would like to ask you some preliminary questions to get a feel for your view on the study:

- What is your birth date?
- Do you currently or had a parent or parental figure incarcerated during your teenage years, which is between the time you were 15-17 years old?
- Was your parent or parental figure incarcerated for at least two years?
- Was your parent or parental figure living with you for at least a month before he or she was incarcerated?
- Would you feel comfortable talking about your personal experiences of having your parent or parental figure incarcerated during your adolescence?
- Would you feel comfortable talking about aspects of your personal life, as they relate to the experience of having a parent or parental figure incarcerated?
- Do you currently have any mental/emotional/physical challenges that might make you vulnerable to participate in this study? Are you pregnant? (Review IRB vulnerable populations here with potential participant)
- What do you consider to be the risks involved in this study, for you personally?

- Are you comfortable participating in this type of research?
- Can you please review for me your understanding of this study? And its purpose?

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and feelings with me. I would like to get back to you in the coming weeks as I am starting my research study, to schedule our first interview meeting. I will need to obtain written consent for you to participate in the study. We will go over this consent form during our first interview meeting and you can ask any questions about the consent agreement at that time. At that time, we can also address any concerns you might have about the study process and your involvement.

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Overall Research Question: What is the experience of having a parent or parental figure incarcerated during one's adolescence?

1. Tell me about the moment in time when you found out about your parent's or parental figure's incarceration. (Probes: How were you told? What was your experience like when you heard the news? What happened next? What did this news mean to you?)
2. Tell me what stands out for you in your life after your parent or parental figure was incarcerated. (Probes: Were there any changes in your life at that time? Afterwards? What was that experience like?)
3. Tell me what your experience was like of your parent or parental figure while he or she was incarcerated. (Probes: Did you get to see them? What was it like to see him or her? What was your experience of your parent or parental figure before the incarceration? What was your relationship like with your parent or parental figure before he or she was incarcerated? Afterwards?)
4. Tell me what it was like to carry on in your life afterwards, after your parent or parental figure was incarcerated. (Probes: What was going on in your life at the time? Could you talk to your friends about it? If so, what was that like? If not, what was that experience like?)
5. Tell me about how you made sense of this experience. (Probes: What or who was helpful/unhelpful in understanding your experience? Were there any turning points or people in your experience?)

Appendix D

Participant Questions to Assess Consent for Research Study

To assess the research participant's understanding of his or her rights in participating in a research study, the following questions will be asked:

1. Can you tell me what will happen if you agree to take part in this research study?
 - a. How long might we meet? How many times might we meet?
2. How might this research study help you?
3. How might this research study not help you, or even hurt you?
4. Do you have to be in this research study?
5. What would you do if you wanted to leave the research study?
6. What will happen if you decide not to be in the research study?

Appendix E

Statement on Protecting the Rights of Human Subjects

I, _____, acting for my self, agree
 Name of the Participant

to take part in the research study entitled *Making Sense: The Untold Stories of Parental Incarceration during Adolescence*, Sarah E. Vernon, LCSW, under the supervision of Dr. Jim Lampe, will carry out this research. This research study is being conducted under the auspices of the Institute for Clinical Social Work at Robert Morris Center, 401 South State Street, Suite 822, Chicago, Illinois, 60605, and (312) 935-4232.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to learn about what it was like for you to have a parent or parental figure incarcerated when you were growing up. The results of the study may be used to educate the mental health and social work field and explain the current knowledge.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will be asked to do the following:

- You will participate in up to three 45 minutes to one hour interviews and the fourth and optional interview could last up to 30 minutes, with me, the researcher.
- The interview will be digitally recorded in order to insure the most complete record of your comments and thoughts.
- The digital voice recording of the interview will be transcribed, meaning that the words that you spoke will be written down as closely as possible to what you said.
- After all of the interviews are transcribed, you may be asked to meet with me again. If we meet again, at that time I will read aloud to you what you told me and we can make any changes, additions or deletions to the transcription that we feel necessary to accurately reflect your feelings, thoughts, and views on the subject.
- The research interviews will be conducted at a time that is convenient to you.

Benefits of Participation in this Research

There are no benefits to participating in this research study. As a possible benefit, you may gain insight or new understanding in reviewing this portion of your life. Your participation could create new knowledge and understanding experience of having a parent or parental figure incarcerated during the teenage years. In gratitude for your time, a \$30 Visa gift card will be given at the end of the completed interviews.

Costs

There will be no cost to you associated in being a participant in this research study.

Possible Risks or Side Effects

Participation in this research study has minimal risks as defined by federal regulations on human subject research. However, there is a risk in thinking about your feelings and thoughts regarding your experience of having a parent or parental figure incarcerated

during your teenage years, which means you, could encounter uncomfortable feelings. While I do not expect this, should you become too uncomfortable or emotionally upset to continue during the research interviews, I am prepared to stop the formal research interview and talk with you about your uncomfortable and upsetting feelings. I have provided my phone number in case you need to contact me about any distress occurring immediately after the research interviews. Should you feel upset after the research interviews have ended, names and agencies of three clinical social workers will be on an index card available to you for up to three sessions at no cost to you, if you need it.

Privacy/Confidentiality

The intent of this research study is to describe the experiences of having a parent or parental figure incarcerated during your teenage years. The records of this research study will be kept private. In any of the written materials, I may quote what you say or report in the body of the writing, but I will exclude your name, or any identifying information about you. In the records that I keep you will be given a code number and a randomly assigned new name. The sheet with your name and code number will be kept separate from the rest of the research data in a locked filing cabinet. All of the research materials will be kept in locked filing cabinet. Only, I, the primary researcher, will have access to them.

To make the research interview as confidential as legally possible, your research interview will first randomly be assigned another name. If you are asked to meet with me to edit, add, or delete from the original transcript, your new transcript will be assigned a new name, as will all the people that you have mentioned in the interview. This second step is necessary so that even you will not know the name being used to represent your research interview. All the previous research materials that in any way can be linked to the identity of actual subject will be destroyed at this point.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

If you decide to participate in this research study, you may refuse to answer any question and at any time you may withdraw from the study. Your decision on whether or not to participate in this research will have no effect on your current or future relationship with the Institute for Clinical Social Work or the primary researcher. I will be available to answer any questions that occur to you during the research interview or following the research interview to talk with you about any feelings that you might have after completing it. If you would like, I will give you a summary of the research findings after the research study has been completed and approved, upon request.

Compensation

If you decide to participate in this research study, you will receive at the completion of the last completed research interview a \$30 Visa gift card, in gratitude for your time. Participants will not be eligible for compensation if they withdraw before the completion of the study.

Statement of Consent

If you are the participant, by signing this consent form you agree to take part in this study. You have not given up any of your rights, or released the Institute for Clinical Social Work from responsibility for carelessness. You may cancel your consent or refuse to continue in this study at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits. Your relationship with me, or the staff of the Institute for Clinical Social Work will not be affected in any way, now, or in the future, if you refuse to take part, or begin the study and then withdraw.

You have been given an opportunity to ask any questions you wish concerning this research study and all such questions have been answered to your complete satisfaction. If you have any further questions about the research methods, you can call Sarah E. Vernon, M.A. at (312) 330-6023 or Dr. Jim Lampe, PhD, the dissertation chair, at (773) 665-1380, before 10pm. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Dr. John Ridings, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Institute for Clinical Social Work at the Robert Morris Center, 401 South State Street, Suite 822, Chicago, Illinois, 60605, (312) 935-4232.

Signatures

I HAVE READ THIS CONSENT FORM AND I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY AS IT IS EXPLAINED IN THIS CONSENT FORM.

Signature of Participant Date

I CERTIFY THAT I HAVE EXPLAINED THE RESEARCH STUDY TO _____ [Name of participant] AND I BELIEVE THAT THEY UNDERSTAND AND THAT THEY HAVE AGREED TO PARTICIPATE FREELY. I AGREE TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS WHEN THEY ARISE DURING THE RESEARCH OR AFTERWARD, AS DESCRIBED ABOVE.

Signature of Researcher Date

CODE #:

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