

**Gender, Institutions, and Punishment: Examining the Experiences of Formerly
Incarcerated Women**

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
Sociology in the Graduate School
of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

While men account for 93 percent of the U.S. prison population, women have seen an increase of over 700 percent in incarceration rates since the 1980s. Despite this, most sociological and criminological research examines the incarceration and reentry experiences and consequences of men. Additionally, existing research on system-involved women rarely disentangles the role of race in women's criminal justice involvement and experiences. Thus, this dissertation uses an intersectional approach to explore how formerly incarcerated women navigate various institutions during the incarceration and reentry period. For this project, I use 40 semi-structured interviews with women primarily in North Carolina. The chapters in this dissertation explore the following research questions; 1) How do institutional responses to women's childhood victimization and adult entrapment shape women's pathways to prison? 2) How do mothers define and construct their maternal identities while imprisoned? 3) What strategies do women use to navigate reentering the paid labor market?

Dedication

“The nature of the criminal justice system has changed. It is no longer primarily concerned with the prevention and punishment of crime, but rather with the management and control of the disposed.” – Michelle Alexander

For all of the amazing women I had the opportunity to meet and speak with, thank you for allowing me to take part in your journey.

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1. Introduction

Between 1980 and 2010, the number of individuals under correctional supervision in the United States (U.S.) rose from about 1.9 to 7.1 million (Glaze 2011). As of 2016, approximately 2.1 million individuals were under correctional supervision in state and federal prisons and jails, and about 4.5 million adults were under community supervision (i.e., parole, probation) (Kaeble and Cowhig 2018).¹ Currently, one in three Americans are estimated to have an arrest record, and about 47 million individuals have a criminal record (Carson 2018; Travis 2002). The rising rate of incarceration signifies that a growing number of individuals are being released and returning to their communities. Over 700,000 people are released from prisons annually (West, Sabol, and Greenman 2010), and nearly 95 percent of all incarcerated individuals will eventually be released from prison (Petersilia 2003). Prior scholarship has thoroughly documented the reentry challenges faced by formerly incarcerated individuals. Research demonstrates that formerly incarcerated persons often struggle with several activities required for successful reintegration such as gaining employment, receiving public assistance, finding housing, and getting financial aid to pursue higher education.

¹ According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2016, there were 1,505,400 individuals incarcerated in prison, 740,700 individuals incarcerated in jail, 3,673,100 individuals on probation, and 874,800 individuals on parole (Kaeble and Cowhig 2018).

While the challenges for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals are well-documented (see Western, Weiman, and Pattillo 2004), most studies focus on the experiences of men (Pager 2003; Wacquant 2010; Wildeman, Turney, and Yi 2016). While men account for 93 percent of the U.S. prison population, women have seen an increase of more than 700 percent in incarceration rates since 1980 (The Sentencing Project 2016). As of 2016, over 200,000 women were incarcerated in state and federal prisons and local jails (The Sentencing Project 2016). Moreover, while women account for less than 10 percent of all U.S. prisoners, they make up more than 25 percent of individuals under community supervision (Haney 2010).

The rise in women's criminal justice contact and incarceration are not a reflection of a change in the criminality of women (Belknap 1996; Chesney-Lind. 1997). Instead, the rise is partially attributed to the use of criminal justice institutions to address noncriminal social problems such as substance abuse (Hinton 2016). This change in the purpose of the criminal justice system was followed by more punitive legislative measures such as mandatory minimum sentencing, the three strikes law, and truth in sentencing (Covington and Bloom 2003).²

² "Mandatory minimum sentence laws require minimum prison terms for people convicted of particular crimes. Three strikes laws typically required minimum 25-year sentences for people convicted of a third felony. State truth-in-sentencing laws typically required that people sentenced to imprisonment for affected crimes serve at least 85 percent of their nominal sentences" (Travis et al. 2014).

Although proponents of criminal justice reform highlight the progress made in the past decade, the decline in prison rates since 2009 has mostly been among men (Sawyer 2018). Specifically, the incarceration rates for men in state prisons fell by 5 percent between 2009 and 2015, while only declining .29 percent for women within the same time period. In fact, in many states, the growth of the women's prison population has counteracted the decline of the men's prison population (Goodwin 2015; Sawyer 2018). Moreover, while the population of women under correctional and community supervision has dramatically risen, the experiences of incarcerated and returning women are often overlooked in public discourse, scholarship, and policies surrounding criminal justice reform and reintegration. Existing research often reduces the criminal justice experiences of women to their roles as partners of incarcerated men and mothers of children with incarcerated fathers (Comfort 2008; Lopoo and Western 2005; Sugie 2012; Western and Wildeman 2009). However, coming into contact with the criminal justice system is not without direct consequences and implications for women, families, and communities.

1.1 Who are Incarcerated Women?

There are some similarities between the mass incarceration of men and women. Like for men, state and local policies largely drove the increase in mass incarceration for women (Sawyer 2018). However, unlike men, most incarcerated women are in jails and the growth of women's incarceration has disproportionately been located in local

jails (Kajstura 2019). This is a concern as jails provide worse healthcare for both physical and mental health, make it more expensive for women to remain in contact with their families via phone, and have more restrictive rules for in-person contact (Gullapalli 2019). Another concern is that their presence in jails means large amounts of incarcerated women have never been to trial. Specifically, 60 percent of women in jail are there pre-trial (Kajstura 2019). A report by the Prison Policy Initiative found that of the 61,000 women incarcerated in jail who have not been convicted of a crime, 29.5 percent of them were charged with drug-related crimes (e.g., drug possession), 31.1 percent with property crimes (e.g., burglary, fraud, theft), 23 percent with a violent offense (e.g., murder, manslaughter, robbery), and 16.3 percent with public order crimes (e.g., prostitution, disorderly conduct, public drunkenness). Of the 40,000 women in jail who have been convicted of a crime, 27.5 percent were convicted of drug-related crimes, 32.5 percent for property crimes, 15 percent for violent crimes, and 25 percent for public order crimes. In addition to the 101,000 women in jail, there are also 99,000 women in prison. 24.7 percent of these women have been convicted for drug-related crimes, 26.3 percent for property crimes, 37.4 percent for violent crimes, and 10.2 percent for public order crimes. There are also 15,000 women in federal prisons, 7,700 in immigrant detention centers, and 6,600 girls in youth facilities (Kajstura 2019). The clear picture that emerges from this data is that the majority of women in correctional facilities are there

for non-violent drug and property related crimes, and many incarcerated women have not actually been convicted of a crime.

While it is possible that the growth of women in jails may be solely attributed to increases in crime rates and thus arrest rates of women, Kajstura (2019) finds that between 2016 and 2017, the number of women in jail on any day increased by 5 percent, despite women's arrest rates declining by 0.7 percent within that same time period. Instead, it is more likely that increases are due to the pre-correctional social and economic vulnerabilities experienced by women under correctional supervision (Kajstura 2019). Most incarcerated women struggle with employment before incarceration and during reentry (Lalonde and Cho 2008; Mumola 2000; Swavola, Riley, and Subramanian 2016). For instance, Mumola (2000) found that 60 percent of incarcerated women with children reported being unemployed in the month prior to their arrest. Given these economic realities, it is not surprising that women incarcerated in jails may have a difficult time paying bail, especially when studies show that the bail set for women can amount to their annual income (Kajstura 2019).³ The inability to post bail ultimately increases the length of women's confinement.

Besides employment challenges and obstacles that arise from being held in jail, incarcerated women are disproportionately less educated, poor, and likely to be single

³ The median annual incomes for incarcerated women ages 27-42 prior to incarceration, in 2014 dollars is \$13,890 (Rabuy and Kopf 2015)

parents (Chesney-Lind 1997; Harlow 2003; Steffensmeier and Haynie 2000).

Furthermore, incarcerated individuals are less educated than the general public. Reports find that only 36.1 percent of incarcerated individuals had earned at least a high school diploma (Harlow 2003), compared with about 85 percent of the U.S. adult population in that year (Stoops 2004). While incarcerated women fare better than men, they still have relatively low levels of education compared to the general population. Specifically, 41.8 percent of incarcerated women have less than a high school diploma, about 44 percent have a high school diploma or GED equivalent, and 11.2 percent have some postsecondary or college education (Harlow 2003). Most strikingly, only 3.1 percent of incarcerated women have a college degree (Harlow 2003) compared to 30.2 of the adult female population (Bauman and Ryan 2015).

More than half of individuals in prison are parents to minor children.

Specifically, 52 percent of state and 63 percent of federal prisoners have minor children. Within this group, 62 percent of women and 51 percent of men in state prisons report having minor children (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). Additionally, almost 80 percent of women in jails report being a parent, and the majority of these women report being single parents (Swavola et al. 2016). As women are typically the primary caregivers for their children prior to incarceration, they are five times more likely to have their children placed into foster care compared to incarcerated fathers whose children typically remain with their mothers (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). In fact, 88 percent of

incarcerated fathers report their children being with their other parent, compared to 37 percent of incarcerated mothers. Even when the children of incarcerated mothers are not placed into foster care, many of them still experience a change in residential arrangements, as 45 percent of them are placed with a grandparent and 23 percent are placed with other relatives (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). The placement of children has consequences for women's ability to contact their children and be reunified with their children during reentry (Kennedy 2012; Laughlin et al. 2008).

1.2 From Jim Crow to Mass Incarceration – Racial Disparities in Incarceration

While the incarcerated population in the U.S. has dramatically risen in the past four decades, this increase has not been equally distributed across racial/ethnic groups (Travis, Western, and Redburn 2014). Instead, Black individuals make up a disproportionate amount of the population under correctional supervision (Travis et al. 2014). In 2017, while Blacks represented roughly 13 percent of the U.S. adult population, they represented 33 percent of the prison population (Gramlich 2019). These disproportionate rates of incarceration remain when considering gender. Specifically, Black men comprise 37 percent of incarcerated men despite being roughly 13 percent of the U.S. adult male population (Carson and Golinelli 2013; U.S. Census Bureau 2014). Black women are 29 percent of the incarcerated female population, despite comprising

about 14 percent of the U.S. adult female population (Kajstura 2019; U.S. Census Bureau 2019).

The disproportionate number of racial/ethnic minorities under correctional supervision cannot be attributed to disproportionate rates of criminal behavior. In fact, while the incarcerated population went from being 70 percent white and 30 percent nonwhite in 1950 to 34 percent white and 60 percent Black and Latinx by 2006 (Carson 2018; Wacquant 2010), there was no change in criminality rates between the groups (Tonry and Melewski 2008). Instead, much of the change in the racial makeup of the incarcerated population can be attributed to legislative changes in sentencing (e.g., mandatory minimums, truth-in-sentencing), and ensuing racial/ethnic disparities in sentencing and case processing (Travis et al. 2014). These legislative changes and the resulting disparities have led some scholars to argue that mass incarceration is the newest reincarnation of racialized social control (Alexander 2010; Forman Jr. 2012; Haley 2016).

In the book *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander argues that mass incarceration in the U.S. is a system of social control that sustains a racial caste system, perpetuates the marginalization of Black people, and reinforces second class citizenship status. She contends that following the Civil Rights Movement, overt racial animus could no longer be used to justify discrimination or social exclusion. Thus, a new method of racialized social control emerged from the criminal justice system in the form of mass

incarceration. Under this new system, the War on Drugs replaced Jim Crow as the primary mechanism for discrimination and racial control. Moreover, this new system rendered incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people as the only social group deemed appropriate to discriminate against through legislation, policy, and practice (Alexander 2010).

1.3 Black Women and the Criminal Justice System

While Alexander's framing of the criminal justice system has been useful for understanding the role of incarceration in racial subordination, it neglects "the way in which gender mediates the functioning of the system" (Ocen 2013:476). Instead, her framework elevates the experiences of men—specifically working-class Black men (Pager 2003; Wacquant 2001; Western 2002). This elevation occurs when women are absent from the scholarship or only examined as the romantic partners of incarcerated men and mothers of children with incarcerated fathers (Comfort 2008; Geller and Crosnoe 2013; Sugie 2012). Moreover, the existing scholarship on mass incarceration and women flattens the experiences of all women and fails to highlight racial differences (see Cooper-Sadlo et al. 2019; Heidemann, Cederbaum, and Martinez 2016; Wesely and Dewey 2018). Essentially, while some studies on mass incarceration address race or gender, relatively few studies examine race *and* gender intersectionally. Instead, studies often reduce the experiences of Blacks to Black men and women to White women (Ocen 2013).

This is troubling, given the increase in the number of incarcerated Black women over the past four decades (The Sentencing Project 2016). Currently, Black women are incarcerated at two times the rate of white women (The Sentencing Project 2016). The criminalization of Black women has consequences for individual women and families (Goodwin 2015; Gurusami 2017; Ocen 2013; Roberts 2012). For example, studies show that approximately 36 percent of Black women were receiving welfare benefits prior to being incarcerated compared to 20 percent of white women (Allard 2002; Harlow 2003). Approximately 50 percent of incarcerated Black women earned less than \$600 per month prior to being incarcerated, compared to 39 percent of white women (Allard 2002). Thus, incarceration may function to exacerbate the economically vulnerable positions of Black women, who are already susceptible to the impacts of the feminization of poverty (Cawthorne 2008; Ezeala Harrison 2010).

1.4 Reentry and Reintegration

As the overwhelming majority of incarcerated women will eventually be released from jail or prison, exploring reentry is crucial for developing successful reintegration policies and practices (Visher and Travis 2003). Most women who are released from jail and prison will have additional criminal justice contact (Durose, Cooper, and Snyder 2014). Studies of recidivism rates for women find that 58 percent of women are rearrested, 38 percent are reconvicted, and 30 percent are returned to prison within three years of their initial release (Deschenes, Owen, and Crow 2006). Moreover,

68 percent of women are arrested within five years of release (Durose et al. 2014) and 77 percent will be arrested within nine years (Alper, Durose, and Markman 2018). For many women, the negative effects of their time in prison are compounded by their histories of poverty, physical and sexual abuse, substance abuse, and mental illness (Richie 2001). Women's recidivism rates are also affected by race, with Black women being more likely to be rearrested, reconvicted, and reincarcerated than White women (Deschenes et al. 2006).

However, desistance from crime is not the only sign of successful reintegration. Thus, many studies have moved beyond examining recidivism rates, and instead scholars are exploring the factors that produce or inhibit successful reintegration (Reisig, Holtfreter, and Morash 2002). For formerly incarcerated persons, successful integration is marked by the ability to meet essential needs such as food and shelter, reengage with key institutions such as the labor market and social services, and reestablish positive social networks (Travis 2000). For women, while successful reintegration encompasses the aforementioned factors, these factors are complicated by their gender.

First, returning women must fulfill the many conditions of their probation/parole. These conditions often require women to consistently meet with parole officers, actively pursue and find stable employment, avoid individuals with a criminal record, enroll in substance abuse treatment programs, and adhere to mobility restrictions (e.g., no change in residence, no driving) (Opsal 2015). For many women, the

conditions of parole/probation are tantamount to perpetual surveillance by the state, and their inability to fulfill these requirements heightens their risk of reincarceration (Gurusami 2017; Opsal 2015).

Second, women must achieve financial stability, which is often tied to employment. Employment is critical to women's ability to have access to housing and other material resources. It is also a major condition of parole, as "parole officers have consistently relied on labor as a normalizing institution, a source of social control, and as a sign of competent reintegration" (Opsal 2015:194). Despite this, women with criminal records and formerly incarcerated women face tremendous challenges when attempting to reenter the labor market (Gurusami 2018, 2019; Lageson 2016; Morris, Sumner, and Borja 2008; Sheely n.d.; Tonkin et al. 2004). The labor market barriers such employer preferences for hiring individuals without criminal records (Pager 2007), and the proliferation of online background checks (Lageson 2016) make it very difficult for women to achieve financial independence or stability. Moreover, for many formerly incarcerated women, childcare may also be a hindrance when attempting to reenter the labor market.

Third, many formerly incarcerated women enter and leave prison with chronic medical conditions and mental health challenges and have few resources to address them (Freudenberg 2002; O'Brien and Young 2006). The causes of chronic physical and mental health conditions among incarcerated women are complex. For many

incarcerated persons who live in low-income communities prior to imprisonment, correctional institutions often provide them with first-time access to medical care (Dumont et al. 2012; Wildeman and Wang 2017). As a result, 40 percent of incarcerated individuals with a chronic medical condition are diagnosed during incarceration (see Wildeman and Wang 2017). While there are benefits to diagnosis, correctional facilities widely differ in their ability to provide medical care and treat chronic conditions (Freudenberg and Heller 2016). For instance, access to medical care is worse in jails than it is in state and federal prisons, and this is especially true for mental health care (Wilper et al. 2009). Wilper and colleagues (2009:670) suggest that the poor mental health treatment available in correctional facilities reflects “limited access to psychiatric treatment among those with mental disorders prior to incarceration, and prisons’ new societal role as asylums following the mass closures of inpatient mental health facilities in the 1980s.” When poor mental health care is combined with the fact that 65 percent of women in prison and 68 percent of women in jail report having a history of mental health problems, compared to 35 and 41 percent of males in prison and jails (Bronson and Berzofsky 2017), it becomes more clear why incarcerated women struggle with poor health after release. In sum, women are more likely to enter jails and prisons with health conditions and do not receive adequate care while incarcerated; thus, they return to society with untreated chronic physical and mental health conditions that ultimately impede reentry.

Correctional facilities are riddled with factors that contribute to poor health such as overcrowding, poor dietary options, violence, social isolation, and limited opportunities for physical activity (O'Brien and Young 2006). Given the health risks associated with incarceration and limited access to adequate health care, receiving effective treatment for mental and physical health, and substance abuse during reentry is a critical component of successful reintegration (Scroggins and Malley 2010). However, women often find that effective substance abuse and mental health treatment is limited when they return to their communities (LaVigne, Brooks, and Shollenberger 2009; Schram et al. 2006; Scroggins and Malley 2010). Women also cannot afford to leave low-income neighborhoods, which are often rife with conditions that negatively impact mental and physical health, such as violence, poor housing conditions, and limited space for recreational activities (O'Brien and Young 2006). Formerly incarcerated women also lack access to health insurance. A report by the Urban Institute found 66 percent of returning women were uninsured 2-3 months following release, and 58 percent were uninsured 8-10 months post release (Mallik-Kane and Visher 2008).

Aside from meeting material and medical needs, successful reintegration requires women to reestablish positive social support networks (Visher and Travis 2011). Research indicates that during reentry, women place more value and rely more heavily on social support compared to men (see Pettus-Davis et al. 2018). Social support

provides a safety net for individuals struggling with finding employment and stable housing among other resources (Harding et al. 2014). In addition to housing and employment, social support also helps reduce the risk of physical and sexual abuse for women during reentry. For example, Cobbina's (2010) study found that a lack of housing often drove women to reenter relationships with abusive partners who could provide shelter. Social support and strong social network bonds also serve as a stigma reduction tool for individuals during reentry (LeBel 2012). Although all formerly incarcerated individuals are confronted with institutionalized stigma in housing, employment, and social services, studies find that stigma has greater negative consequences for women (see Gunn, Sacks, and Jemal 2018).

Finally, most incarcerated mothers report being the primary caregiver for their children prior to being imprisoned; thus, they often face unique challenges pertaining to mother-child reunification following release. Reunification complicates reentry, as women must fulfill all other requirements for successful reintegration while attempting to regain or maintain custody and then provide care for their children (Bloom, Owen, and Covington 2003). Most children of incarcerated women end up living with another family member during the period of incarceration. Glaze and Maruschak (2008) found that about 37 percent of women reported their children living with the other parent, 45 percent with grandparents, 22 percent with other relatives, and 11 percent in foster care. Some mothers lose custody or have their parental rights terminated because of

incarceration (Nicholson 2006). Mothers whose parental rights are not terminated must still contend with serious challenges to establishing contact or custody following release (Kennedy 2012). Reestablishing custody is often accompanied by state involvement, usually in the form of social service agencies that determine the conditions by which women demonstrate parental fitness (Kennedy 2012). Moreover, for women whose children are placed into foster care, mother-child reunification requires engaging with various surveilling institutions such as law enforcement and Child Protective Services (Bridges 2011; Opsal 2009; Roberts 2012), which may heighten the risk of reincarceration.

Incarceration contributes to a cycle of economic vulnerability, substance abuse, health challenges, and social isolation that present unique challenges for women (Freudenberg 2002). Furthermore, while all incarcerated women may encounter many of these reentry challenges, women of color “face the triple jeopardy of poverty, racism, and stigma toward ex-offenders” (Freudenberg 2002:1896). During reentry, women face interwoven challenges that often rival and intensify one another (Richie 2001). Thus, to understand barriers to reentry, studies must move beyond understanding these barriers as mutually exclusive and instead recognize the interconnected nature of reentry challenges (Welsh and Rajah 2014). For example, women’s physical and mental health issues contribute to challenges they face in the labor market, which ultimately impacts their ability to secure other material resources such as housing (Mallik-Kane and Visher 2008). Housing instability can trigger other challenges such as homelessness (Lipsitz

2012; Opsal and Foley 2013), which increases the chance of incarceration (Greenberg and Rosenheck 2008). Understanding the complex nature of incarceration and reentry will also allow scholars and policymakers to introduce gender-responsive solutions to the challenges of reentry.

Gender responsiveness refers to “creating an environment... that reflects an understanding of the realities of women’s lives and addresses [their] issues...” (Bloom et al. 2003). It allows researchers to understand how policies and practices influence women’s experiences while incarcerated and during release. It also prompts programs to evaluate their ability to provide support for women during reentry and provide adjustments when practices inadequately consider gender differences (Berman 2005). Implementing gender responsive practices provides the opportunity for improvement in addressing pathways to incarceration, meeting the needs of incarcerated women, and improving outcomes for women, families, and communities during reentry (Bloom et al. 2003).

1.5 Dissertation Overview

This dissertation examines how women’s criminal justice involvement is influenced by key institutions (e.g., the family, the juvenile justice system, social services). It also explores how incarceration ultimately affects women’s interactions with institutions. This study highlights the experiences of women through three stages of criminal justice involvement: pre-incarceration, imprisonment, and reentry. Specifically,

I explore the mechanisms that contribute to criminal justice involvement for women, how they make sense of their maternal identity and role while incarcerated, and their navigation of the labor market during reentry. I also explore how race, class, and gender shape incarceration and reentry.

Chapter 2 examines gendered pathways to criminal activity and incarceration. Prior research suggests that women's pathways to prison are driven by five key factors: economic marginalization, histories of physical and sexual victimization (both in childhood and adulthood), drug and alcohol addiction, mental illness, and racial/ethnic inequality (Ocen 2017; Richie 1996). While these factors have been thoroughly investigated in numerous studies, few studies examine the role of institutions along women's pathways to prison. This chapter uses a single case to generalize about participants in the study in order to examine women's experiences with victimization and entrapment, and institutional responses to the survival strategies women use to mitigate their adverse experiences.

In the third chapter, I use the accounts of formerly incarcerated mothers to examine how they define and construct their maternal identities while imprisoned. While most incarcerated women are mothers, prior scholarship has yet to investigate how incarcerated mothers construct their maternal identities while accounting for dominant ideologies of intensive mothering. This exploration of maternal identity construction is valuable as scholars contend that individuals with "troubled identities"

such as incarcerated mothers, consistently engage in identity work to move beyond negative social judgements associated with one or more of their identities (Gubrium and Holstein 2001). Thus, this chapter provides an examination of the identity work incarcerated mothers engage in when attempting to reconstruct their maternal identity to fit hegemonic notions of womanhood and motherhood.

Chapter 4 draws from an intersectional framework to explore how social categories create independent and overlapping systems of disadvantage for formerly incarcerated women entering the labor market. Although not absent from prior research, we know very little about how criminal records impact Black women's employability (Decker et al. 2014; Gurusami 2017, 2019; Morris et al. 2008). However, there are reasons to suspect that Black women will face unique employment obstacles during reentry, as they must contend with the "triple jeopardy" of gender-based discrimination, racial discrimination, and the mark of a criminal record. Thus, I use an intersectional approach to explore the role of both race and gender in women's experiences.

In addition to examining women's experiences at different points of their criminal justice involvement and incarceration, this dissertation explores how the collateral consequences of incarceration function to punish already marginalized women.

2. Criminalizing Survival: Institutional Responses to Women's Pathways to Prison

2.1 Introduction

As the overwhelming majority of incarcerated individuals are men (Carson 2018), it is not surprising that past criminological and sociological studies of crime and incarceration examines how and why men become involved in the criminal justice system. More recently, research has emerged exploring women's criminal justice involvement. Scholars studying system-involved women have explored perspectives that consider whether women have unique and gendered pathways into the criminal justice system relative to men (Brennan et al. 2012; Chesney-Lind 1997; Chesney-Lind and Rodriguez 1983; Daly 1992; Salisbury and Van Voorhis 2009). This line of research contends that women's criminal justice involvement are rooted in factors not usually occurring with men, factors that occur with men and women but are seen in greater frequency with women, or factors found with equal incidence in both men and women but with unique effects for women (see Salisbury and Van Voorhis 2009). This line of research explores the perspective of gendered pathways to crime.

Gendered pathways scholarship uses the life histories of women to connect childhood and adult experiences to women's criminal justice involvement. It identifies the psychological and social factors unique to incarcerated women's experiences and uses these factors to develop a framework of potential pathways to crime. These factors

include childhood abuse and victimization (Gilfus 2002; Siegel and Williams 2003; Simkins et al. 2004; Widom 2000), poverty (Holtfreter, Reisig, and Morash 2004), substance abuse (CASA 2010; Morash and Schram 2002), and mental health challenges (Dehart et al. 2014). Despite the growing body of literature, prior studies typically highlight the personal factors, characteristics, and experiences that contribute to women's criminal justice involvement (Brennan et al. 2012; Dehart 2008; Dehart et al. 2014). Few studies examine the institutional factors that intersect with women's personal characteristics to shape their pathways to prison. There is also a lack of research that addresses the criminalization of women's survival strategies and how that impacts women's criminal justice involvement (Chesney-Lind 2002). Furthermore, while some studies note the number of women involved in various institutions (e.g., foster care, juvenile justice system, social services) throughout the life course, few studies directly explore how these institutions are both gendered and racialized and how this shapes women's pathways to prison.

Using a single case, I examine women's experiences with victimization and entrapment and institutional responses to the survival strategies they use to mitigate their experiences. I also explore the role of race and gender in institutional responses. I argue that while many incarcerated women attempt to resist both childhood and adulthood victimization and entrapment, their strategies of resistance are criminalized leaving them further marginalized. I contend that institutional responses are both

gendered and racialized, which further diminishes an already vulnerable population. I suggest that the emphasis on women's individual experiences in the pathways perspective obscures the critical role of institutions in shaping women's pathways to prison.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Gendered Pathways to Crime

Chesney-Lind and Rodriguez (1983) produced one of the first studies that attempted to answer the question of what type of women end up incarcerated and why? Their study of the Oahu Community Correctional Center in Hawaii examined the various personal characteristics associated with women's criminal justice involvement. They proposed five key factors: childhood abuse, poverty and property related crimes, prostitution rooted in childhood victimization, substance abuse, and naïve aspirations. Since then, many studies have also examined the role of gender in women's criminal justice involvement, and many of these studies have relied on a gendered pathways perspective (Brennan et al. 2012; Kruttschnitt 2013; Salisbury and Van Voorhis 2009; Wesely and Dewey 2018).

The gendered pathways approach uses women's life histories and experiences to understand gender differences in their criminal justice involvement (Wesely and Dewey 2018). The framework for this approach was first introduced by Daly's (1992) study on women's pathways to felony courts. The study identified five pathways; a) harmed and

harming women, b) battered women, c) street women, d) drug connected women, and e) other women. Harmed and harming women were identified as women who experienced childhood victimization, resulting in substance abuse and/or mental illness in adulthood. These women were also prone to violent behaviors because of their substance abuse and mental illness. Battered women's pathways to court were marked by their involvement with or the end of a relationship with violent men. Street women were women who were pushed out of or ran away from abusive homes, who then faced substance abuse issues and committed minor crimes (e.g., theft, drug sales) to support their drug addictions. Drug connected women's pathways were marked by drug addictions typically involving their romantic partners or women who engaged in illegal drug sales. Finally, other women were women whose crimes resulted from economic vulnerability. Daly's work on gendered pathways really emphasized the role of childhood victimization in the development of psychological problems, drug addiction, and violent behaviors in adulthood, and how these challenges led to criminal justice involvement in adulthood.

Since Daly's study, various scholars have tested and expanded the gendered pathways perspective (Brennan et al. 2012; Brown 2006; Dehart 2008; Gilfus 2002; Salisbury and Van Voorhis 2009; Wesely and Dewey 2018; White 2008). While these studies illustrate how gender shapes criminal justice involvement, the pathways highlighted often focus on the personal factors that affect criminal justice involvement

such as childhood victimization, substance abuse, and mental illness. Little attention is given to the effect of institutional responses on women's pathways to prison. Moreover, few studies explore how race and gender influence the structural inequalities that contribute to women's outcomes.

2.2.2 Race, Gender, and Institutional Responses to Victimization

2.2.2.1 Institutional Responses to Childhood Victimization

Chesney-Lind (1997) defines the criminalization of victimization as the institutional criminalization of women's survival strategies following victimization and abuse. For many women, victimization precedes their criminal justice involvement (Dehart et al. 2014; McDaniels-Wilson and Belknap 2008). In fact, the prevalence of both physical and sexual abuse among women under correctional supervision is greater than that of women in the general population (Harlow 1999). Approximately 37 percent of women in state prisons and 37 percent of women in jails report experiencing abuse as minors (Harlow 1999). Scholars note that childhood sexual abuse may have more severe consequences for women's criminal justice involvement because compared to boys, girls sexual abuse typically begins earlier, lasts longer, and results in severe psychological consequences (Chesney-Lind 2001). Essentially, many incarcerated women experience abuse and for a large proportion of these women, their abuse and victimization began as minors. Thus, the process of criminalizing victimization is best illustrated through institutional responses to abused and victimized girls.

For girls facing physical and/or sexual abuse in their homes, running away is often the only available survival strategy (Humphrey 2004). One study found that 46 percent of runaway youth report being physically and emotionally abused in their household (Dembo et al. 1995). While girls may respond to abuse at home by running away, institutional responses to this survival strategy involve charging girls with status offenses (e.g., runaway, truancy, underage drinking, curfew violation) (Development Services Group 2015). According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2015), a status offense is a noncriminal act that is considered illegal only because of one's age. Status-offending behaviors are viewed as symptoms of underlying personal, familial, and systemic issues; thus, states have different methods for dealing with status offenders. Approaches to status offenses fall into three categories that involve treating status offenders as: delinquents, neglected or abuse, and other. The classification of a status offense determines how minors are treated within the juvenile justice system. While very few states opt to treat status offenses as delinquent behavior, many youths charged with status offenses end up incarcerated. Youth with status offenses are often incarcerated for probation and court order violations mandated by their status offense (Development Services Group 2015; see Javidani, Sadeh, and Verona 2011).

Research suggests that gender affects status offenses (Davis 2007; Spivak et al. 2014). First, while girls account for just 15 percent of the incarcerated juvenile

population, they make up 38 percent of youth incarcerated for status offenses (The Sentencing Project 2018a). Girls also account for 40 percent of status offense cases that lead to out-of-home placement (Saar et al. 2015) Second, some behaviors that lead to status offenses (e.g., running away) are more likely to be displayed by girls (Snyder and Sickmund 2006; Spivak et al. 2014). Specifically, between 1985 and 2002, 61 percent of status offense cases involving girls were runaway cases (Snyder and Sickmund 2006), and as of 2018, more than half of youth incarcerated for running away are girls (The Sentencing Project 2018a). Third, prosecutors are more likely to have girl's status offense cases filed for review compared to boys (Spivak et al. 2014). Spivak and colleagues suggest that the judicial response to girls shows the gendered nature of the juvenile justice system and the role of judicial paternalism. This form of judicial paternalism stems from the initial role of status offense laws as a way of protecting middle-class White girls from potential violations of hegemonic ideals of morality (Spivak et al. 2014). Fourth, girls with status offenses have the potential to become more entrenched in the juvenile justice system without partaking in any additional "criminal" behavior (Chesney-Lind and Shelden 2004). This happens when girls are repeatedly detained for court order violations related to their status offense (Davis 2007). For example, while violating one's parent/guardian curfew is not a criminal offense prior to a girl entering the justice system, once in the system, it becomes a violation of one's probation and is subsequently treated as a "criminal" offense (Davis 2007). This suggests that status

offenses are often a gateway into the juvenile justice system for girls (Belknap and Holsinger 1998; Chesney-Lind and Shelden 2004; Humphrey 2004). Given that no known studies provide estimates for the percentage of women in the criminal justice system with juvenile records, it is possible that juvenile justice system may function as a critical institution along women's pathways to prison.

Besides the juvenile justice system, there are various institutions that may be tasked with responding to victimized girls. Notable institutions include child welfare services and schools (Snyder and Sickmund 2006). Many of the institutions relevant to victimized girls intersect with the juvenile justice system in ways that may be harmful and contribute to girls' juvenile justice involvement. For example, youths who are dually involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are considered crossover youth (Herz et al. 2012; Saar et al. 2015). Crossover youth are some of the most vulnerable youths under state care and are disproportionately female. Girls make up about 33 to 50 percent of crossover youth despite making up only 20 to 25 percent of the total juvenile population (Herz et al. 2012). Studies suggest that foster care youth often enter the juvenile justice system because foster care and residential placements are often ill equipped to handle the behavioral challenges common amongst girls who have been victims of abuse. Compared to non-child welfare involved youths, crossover youth spend longer periods of time in the juvenile justice system, are more likely to reenter the juvenile justice system following release, and are more likely to be criminal justice

involved as adults (see Saar et al. 2015). Schools are an additional institution that victimized girls are likely to come into contact with. Despite this, studies note that school responses to abused girls typically further victimize them by pushing them out of school and into the juvenile justice system (Morris 2007, 2016; Morris and Perry 2017; Simkins et al. 2004).

While research suggests that gender impacts institutional responses to childhood abuse and victimization, race also plays a critical role in how institutions respond to victimized girls. Thus, it is not surprising that Black women's pathways to prison often involve childhood victimization (Richie 1996), as race appears to shape girls' institutional interactions in various ways. First, Black girls are over-represented in the juvenile justice system. Specifically, Black girls comprise 33.2 percent of female juvenile detainees despite all Black youth representing just 14 percent of the general population (Saar et al. 2015). Second, Black youths are more likely to be involved in the foster care system (Roberts 2012), and once in foster, they are disproportionately likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system (Saar et al. 2015). Black youth in the child welfare system are also less likely to experience familial reunification, more likely to be placed in group homes/settings, and less likely to leave the child welfare system.

Third, the crossover youth pathway is especially consequential for Black youth who are more likely to be involved in the child welfare system and subsequently become involved in the juvenile justice system (see Saar et al. 2015). Fourth, while

research on the school-to-prison pipeline has largely focused on boys, there is evidence that suggests that while the pathway may not be as direct for girls, there is a link between abuse, school misbehavior, and “pushout” which leads to girls juvenile justice involvement (Crenshaw, Ocen, and Nanda 2015).⁴ In fact, Black girls account for about 28 percent of girls referred to law enforcement by schools and 37 percent of girls arrested following referrals, despite making up 15.6 percent of girls enrolled in schools (Epstein, Blake, and González 2017).

2.2.2.2 Gender, Race, and Entrapment

While many incarcerated women’s pathways to prison involve the criminalization of survival strategies used in response to childhood victimization, for adult women, their pathways involve being “entrapped” into crime (Gilfus 2002; Richie 1996). Entrapment refers to economic crimes resulting from poverty and marginalization, crimes related to discriminatory social welfare and correctional policies, and crimes related to domestic violence (Gilfus 2002). For many women, gender and race-based institutional responses to their entrapment and adult victimization influences their initial incarceration and recidivism.

⁴ The school-to-prison “pipeline” refers to the link between citations or arrests in school, and subsequent contact with the justice system; either as a function of exclusionary discipline and dropping out and/or future participation in underground economies” (Morris 2012).

Most incarcerated women struggle with employment before incarceration and during reentry (Lalonde and Cho 2008; Mumola 2000; Swavola et al. 2016), For Black women, their economic vulnerability is even more severe. Studies show that approximately 36 percent of Black women were receiving welfare benefits prior to being incarcerated compared to 20 percent of white women (Allard 2002; Harlow 2003). Approximately 50 percent of incarcerated Black women earned less than \$600 per month prior to being incarcerated, compared to 39 percent of white women (Allard 2002). Given these economic realities, women may resort to illegal activities to provide financially for themselves and their families (Belknap 1996; Chesney-Lind 1997). Thus, it is not surprising that about 26.4 percent of women in prison and 3.17 percent of women in jails are incarcerated for property-related crimes such as theft and fraud (Kajstura 2019).

Besides economically driven crimes, the entrapment of women also refers to the discriminatory social welfare and correctional policies that entrap women. For instance, the War on Drugs was a correctional policy that had the effect of criminalizing substance abuse, which disproportionately impacted Black women (Bush-Baskette 1998; Covington and Bloom 2003). While many incarcerated individuals face substance abuse issues, women are more likely to have a drug addiction (Binswanger et al. 2010). Women are also more likely to have both substance abuse and mental health issues compared to men in prison (CASA 2010). Thus, institutional policies introduced via the War on

Drugs (e.g., mandatory minimums, truth-in-sentencing) function to criminalize substance abuse and entrap women in the criminal justice system (Bush-Baskette 1998; Hinton 2016; Reynolds 2008).

Other social welfare policies also work to entrap women, and these policies are often linked to institutional responses to substance abuse. For instance, while a complete federal ban on welfare assistance for individuals with felony drug convictions has been lifted in many states, as of 2013, twelve states still have a complete ban and twenty-five states have a modified ban on receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits (The Sentencing Project 2013).⁵ Additionally, nine states have a complete ban and twenty-five states have a modified ban on receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits (The Sentencing Project 2013).⁶ Because women are disproportionately recipients of TANF and SNAP benefits (National Women's Law Center 2018; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services 2012), they are disproportionately impacted by policies which prevent them from receiving public assistance due to prior substance abuse. Individuals with felony drug convictions are also barred from living in public housing and receiving financial aid for college (Allard

⁵ The TANF program, which is time limited, assists families with children when the parents or other responsible relatives cannot provide for the family's basic needs. The Federal government provides grants to States to run the TANF program (The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services n.d.)

⁶ SNAP provides nutrition benefits to supplement the food budget of needy families so they can purchase healthy food and move towards self-sufficiency (USDA Food and Nutrition Service n.d.)

2002). This form of housing discrimination is especially consequential for Black women's economic vulnerabilities (Lipsitz 2012). These social welfare policies create webs that can function to ensnare women into committing additional crimes. Thus, it is not surprising that 58 percent of women are rearrested, 38 percent are reconvicted, and 30 percent are returned to prison within three years of their initial release (Deschenes et al. 2006).

For many incarcerated women, their pathways to crime are influenced by gendered and racialized institutional responses to domestic violence (Crenshaw 2013). Law enforcement policies requiring mandatory arrests can be harmful to women and girls experiencing domestic violence. For instance, mandatory arrest policies require police to make an arrest when they have reasonable cause to believe that an individual has committed certain crimes against family members or members of their household (Hirschel 2008). Since the implementation of mandatory arrests, the arrest rates of women for domestic violence has increased primarily because of dual arrests where both individuals involved in a domestic dispute are arrested when officers are "unwilling or unable to determine the initiator of violence" (Sack 2004:1680). Thus, for some women, a domestic assault and/or battery charge may be the catalyst for their pathway to incarceration or their recidivism. Institutional responses to domestic violence also impact women's access to public housing. Lapidus (2002) study illustrates how housing discrimination and zero-tolerance policies against violence in public housing further marginalize victims of domestic violence. For instance, landlords often

check the criminal records of individuals attempting to rent homes, and these records often show the names of both the individual convicted of domestic violence and the complainant. Many landlords and public housing agencies also evict women experiencing domestic abuse. These forms of housing discrimination from private or public institutions may contribute to the types of economic marginalization that entraps women. Furthermore, these policies may force women into homelessness, which also increases their chances of criminal justice involvement (see Lapidus 2002).

Scholars have argued that women in the criminal justice system have gendered pathways to crime and incarceration (Brown 2006; Daly 1992; Salisbury and Van Voorhis 2009). However, much of the pathways literature highlights the personal characteristics of women (e.g., childhood sexual or physical abuse, substance abuse, mental illness), and few studies explore the role of institutions in gendered pathways. Thus, this study aims to explore how gendered and racialized institutional responses shape women's pathways to prison.

2.3 Data and Methods

Using a combination of targeted recruitment and snowball sampling, I recruited 40 women to participate in this study. Because involvement in the criminal justice system is disproportionately distributed by race and socioeconomic status (Carson 2018; Greenfeld and Snell 1999), I targeted working class and predominantly minority communities in the Research Triangle area (i.e., Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill) of

North Carolina. My recruitment strategy involved placing flyers in local businesses, and reentry and social service organizations. I also directly contacted organizations likely to work with formerly incarcerated women in North Carolina and asked them to distribute flyers to existing and potential clients. To be eligible to take part in the study, women had to be; 1) previously incarcerated in jail or prison for a minimum of 2 months, 2) a parent at the time of incarceration, and 3) the primary caregiver of their child prior to incarceration. The eligibility requirements were related to a larger project which examines formerly incarcerated mothers and reentry/reintegration.

Interviews occurred between May 2018 and July 2019, and participants received \$40 USD in compensation. Interviews took place at women's homes, local reentry organizations, public libraries, and coffee shops. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity and potentially identifying information such as the names of their employers and children were changed or omitted. All participants completed a short demographic survey prior to the interview. Interviews were semi-structured, and the interview guide included questions about participants' childhood experiences, romantic partners, parenting, criminal justice involvement, and reentry.

Participants range in age from 23 to 62, with a mean age of 38 (see Table 1). Fifty-eight percent of participants are Black, and 40 percent are White. Approximately 72 percent of participants have a high school diploma or GED equivalent, 10 percent have an associate degree, and 7.5 percent have a bachelor's or advanced degree. Sixty percent

of participants are single and have never been married, 7.5 percent are currently married, 25 percent are separated or divorced, and 7.5 percent are widowed. In terms of their criminal justice involvement, on average, participants have ten prior arrests and six prior convictions and served approximately two years in jail or prison. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, and NVivo software was used for line-by-line coding in order to develop and organize emerging themes

This study focuses on the case of one participant – Veronica Miller. While Veronica’s case will be examined in detail, her case is not terminally unique. Instead, Veronica’s case highlights general patterns observed amongst participants in this study. Moreover, Veronica’s case tells the story of thousands of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics of Sample	N = 40
Race	
Black	58%
White	40%
Native American	2%
Mean Age	38
Highest Level of Education	
Some HS	10%
HS or GED	72.5%
Associate	10%
Bachelors/Masters/Advanced	7.5%
Marital Status	
Single, Never Married	60%
Married	7.5%
Separated/Divorced	25%
Widowed	7.5%

Currently employed	45%
Mean number of arrests	10
Mean number of convictions	6
Mean length of sentence (in months)	23

2.4 Findings – The Case of Veronica Miller

Veronica and I met at her grandmother’s home on a hot summer day. I located her grandmother's home at the end of the street in a working-class black neighborhood. Before ringing the doorbell, Veronica emerged from the front door wearing a black tube top, blue denim jeans, and flip-flop sandals. She had dark brown skin and was wearing black braids with purple streaks in the back. She informed me that her grandmother was cooking inside and that because there was no central air conditioning, the house would be too hot. Veronica grabbed two nearby folding chairs and asked me if it was okay for us to sit outside during the interview, to which I agreed. We spoke for what would eventually become a three-and-a-half-hour-long interview.

2.4.1 Falling Through the Cracks – Institutional (Non)Response to Childhood Victimization

Veronica is a 28-year-old Black woman whose childhood experiences demonstrate the consequences of a lack of adequate institutional responses to victimization. Veronica grew up with a drug-addicted mother unable to provide adequate care for her five children. At the age of three, Veronica and her siblings were removed from the home by child welfare services, and she was sent to live with her father. During this time, Veronica lost contact with her four siblings as they were

also sent to live with their fathers and/or other relatives. Veronica lived with her father for approximately one year until he was arrested and convicted of felony charges relation to drug sales. Following this, child welfare services placed Veronica with her paternal grandmother who lived in Maryland. As a result, Veronica lost contact with her mother and was permanently disconnected from the familial network she had grown up with. Despite these challenges, Veronica would have a relatively stable upbringing for the next decade until her aging grandmother became physically unable to provide care. This would mark the second and more devastating intervention by child welfare services.

Child welfare services determined that Veronica's father was not an eligible candidate for placement because he had a history of incarceration for drug-related charges. Thus, Veronica was placed with a paternal aunt with whom she had very little contact prior to her placement. Veronica's time with her aunt would be filled with verbal and physical abuse, a lack of intervention by social services, and an encounter with the juvenile justice system. Shifting in her seat, Veronica looks up and begins recalling the abuse she experienced with her aunt and her experiences with social workers. She tells me about a time when she contacted her social workers to inform them about the abuse she was experiencing, which prompted an in-home visit. However, the home visit did not have the outcome Veronica was hoping for as her aunt was able to explain away Veronica's claims of abuse:

They asked how I was doing. I put the truth down, how I really was doing and so that made the people come out, that letter got back to the office and made the people come out there and the lady was like, what's going on in the home and, you know, my aunt, she had a good way of covering up everything. So make a long story short, they was like, okay, we see you doing great, bye.

Following the dismissal of Veronica's claims of abuse, her aunt locked her in the basement as a punishment for attempting to alert her social workers about her abuse. Veronica recalls, "She locked me in the basement that same exact day... She'd lock you in the basement and that's her way of your punishment."

Despite her multiple attempts to inform her social workers, Veronica continued to experience verbal and physical abuse while under the care of her aunt and child welfare services. She describes a particularly violent event with her aunt after confronting her about her drug addiction, which child welfare services failed to recognize before placing Veronica. During the confrontation, Veronica's aunt repeatedly beat her with a baseball bat, and like many girls experiencing physical abuse in the home, Veronica ran away (Kaufman and Spatz Widom 1999).

She had beat me with a baseball bat. I took off. I took off, didn't come back...I ran to my friend house. I stayed at my friend house, lied to her mom and everything, told her mom my aunt said I could stay at her house, all this stuff. I was gone for the whole weekend.

When Veronica returned to her aunt's home, police officers met her as her aunt had reported her as a run-away. Veronica was arrested for a status offense and placed into an adult correctional facility overnight while she awaited her court hearing. Veronica's aunt's response is aligned with findings from Davis' (2007) study which suggests that parents/guardians often use the juvenile justice system as a tool of social control for girls they view as misbehaving. Thus, for many girls' parental conflict and challenges to adult authority function as a gateway into the juvenile justice system.

During her court hearing, Veronica provided the judge with multiple accounts of her abuse. Veronica's aunt was in attendance and testified about her time with her. Veronica recalls her aunt convincing the judge that Veronica ran away from home because she had behavioral challenges stating "She's never gonna stay at home... she's just a fast girl, out in the streets. Don't ever come home." During her testimony, Veronica's aunt was able to draw on stereotypes around the adultification of Black girls (Epstein et al. 2017). According to Epstein and colleagues (2017:2), adultification "effectively reduces or removes the consideration of childhood as a mediating factor in Black youths' behavior." By calling her "fast," Veronica's aunt also used stereotypes of Black girls as hypersexual (Epstein et al. 2017; Morris 2007), to persuade the judge the Veronica's behavior did not result from abuse. Furthermore, her aunt employed language that reinforced ideas about Black female deviance and criminality (Gunn et al.

2018; Roberts 2012). Because of her aunt's testimony, the judge ruled to remand Veronica to a group home for one year.

Although tasked with ensuring Veronica's safety, she would later learn that her social workers were unaware of her arrest and placement in a group home for several months. Once her social workers learned of her placement, they visited Veronica who recounted the violent confrontation with her aunt after she accused her of being a drug addict. Her social workers immediately petitioned for and were granted her release. While child welfare services had the agency to intervene immediately and find Veronica a new foster care placement considering her allegations of abuse, they opted to return her to her aunt's care while they launched an investigation into Veronica's claims of her aunt's substance abuse and not the physical abuse Veronica had reported on numerous occasions. Moreover, given the connection between abuse and status offenses for girls such as running away, an adequate institutional response would have required child welfare services to take immediate actions to assess the veracity of Veronica's claims of abuse before placing her with her aunt again.

Through their investigation, child welfare services would later confirm that Veronica's aunt was abusing drugs. However, despite their awareness of Veronica's time in a group home, her claims of physical abuse, and confirmation of her aunt's substance abuse, social workers opted to leave Veronica in the home pending a court hearing to make a final decision about her placement. The pending hearing resulted in

Veronica's aunt lashing out with additional physical violence, which in one incident led to her pushing Veronica down a flight a stairs. When she and her aunt later appeared in court, Veronica still bore numerous bruises on her face and throughout her body. When prompted by social workers, her aunt explained that she had to discipline Veronica in that manner because she was "big for [her] age." Again, her aunt attempted to rely on the adultification Black girls to explain her abuse. However, in light of her drug addiction and the physical evidence of Veronica's abuse, child welfare services finally decided to remove Veronica from her aunt's care and place her into emergency foster care.⁷ In spite of Veronica's continuous claims of verbal and physical abuse, both child welfare services and the juvenile justice system discounted her claims and ultimately punished Veronica for her acts of survival such as running away.

After being removed from her aunt's home, child welfare services placed Veronica in various short-term foster care homes before finally placing her with a permanent foster family. This foster home would mark the seventh home Veronica had lived in since birth, and the fifth home placement she had received through child welfare services. Veronica's placement with her foster family would eventually end following being sexually assaulted by her foster parents' adult biological son who also lived in the home. Because Veronica lived in a foster home with her abuser, she

⁷ Emergency caregivers provide short-term care for children placed in protective state custody, usually 72 business hours, until a relative or foster family placement is found.

experienced the type of frequent and long lasting childhood sexual abuse typically found in women involved in the justice system (Chesney-Lind 2001). Veronica recalls the measures she took to stop the abuse she was experiencing:

So every night, I used to tuck myself so at night...I got in the shower while everybody was eating...I used to bundle myself under the sheets and blankets. They were like, you don't have to lay under them sheets, if you wanta lay under the blanket. No, baby, I used to bundle myself under the sheet. I tucked all the sheets under the mattress and then climbed up in there, tuck the sides up under there and then pull the blanket over me...People used to think I was crazy.

Veronica never mentioned the abuse to her foster parents or her social workers during their subsequent case management visits. Her experience with violence and retaliation after reporting her aunts physical abuse made her weary of reporting the sexual abuse to her social workers, who in her view had failed to come to her aid during her last experience with abuse. This aligns with studies showing that sexual abuse experienced by girls often goes unreported because girls fear violence, retaliation, being isolated from their families, or just a general belief that nothing positive will occur if they disclose (Simkins et al. 2004).

The sexual abuse continued for months until Veronica became pregnant. Studies suggest that childhood sexual abuse heightens the risk of teenage pregnancy (Noll and Shenk 2013; Saewyc, Magee, and Pettingell 2004). Because Veronica was under state

care, her foster parents informed her social workers, and it was only then that child welfare services intervened. She disclosed her abuse, and child welfare services launched an investigation into Veronica's claims with law enforcement. Because of the investigation, her foster parents requested that Veronica be placed with a new foster family, and two weeks later Veronica was removed from their home. Following allegations of mismanaging Veronica's placements and facing pressure from her father, child welfare services agreed to allow Veronica to return to North Carolina to live with another family member. This was the end of her eleven-year involvement with child welfare services.

Feminist scholars argue that women and girls live in a patriarchal society that renders them invisible and powerless, thus shaping their psychological development (see Garcia and Lane 2010). Studies suggest that while girls and boys may face similar challenges, the psychological responses to those challenges differ (Belknap and Holsinger 1998; Faller 1990). Specifically, girls' responses typically involve behaviors such as running away from home and substance abuse that ultimately heighten their risk of juvenile justice involvement (Chesney-Lind 1997). I argue that the case of Veronica Miller suggests that women's pathways to crime and incarceration involves more than the psychological responses and personal traits they develop because of childhood victimization. Instead, women's pathways to prison are also shaped by institutional responses to their victimization. Institutional non-response

and/or failure during childhood can lead to further victimization when girls are kept in abusive situations by the very institutions tasked with intervening. Thus, institutions often function as catalysts for girls' justice-involvement by criminalizing them for their abuse. Institutional responses to childhood abuse are also gendered and racialized, as demonstrated by the ease with which Veronica's abusers could rely on narratives that frame Black girls as hypersexual and morally deficient (Morris 2012), to criminalize her for calling attention to her abuse.

2.4.2 Entrapment - Punishing Poverty and Domestic Abuse

Back in North Carolina, Veronica reconnected with her maternal grandmother, which gave her occasional access to her mother who still struggled with drug addiction. She enrolled in high school and began attending more consistently. Under family pressure and facing doubts from her guardian about whether she was sexually abused, she terminated her pregnancy. However, less than two years later, Veronica was pregnant for the second time and out of fear she hid the pregnancy from her family, who only found out when she went into labor and was hospitalized. This meant that Veronica did not have access to medical and prenatal care throughout her pregnancy. Because of her lack of medical care, Veronica was hospitalized for nearly one month following the birth of her son. Less than two weeks after being discharged from the

hospital and nearly five weeks after birth, Veronica's son passed away from sudden infant death syndrome.⁸

Throughout all the traumatic experiences Veronica endured, there had never been an opportunity to receive mental health treatment for the separation from family, the abuse she experienced as a child, or the death of her son. These events ultimately led to her struggle with depression. She explains:

I just let everything replay in my head. Everything between my aunt [omitted] and everything, I'm like, girl, I just started, I was really going freaking crazy. But that stuff got in my head. Oh, you ain't gonna be nobody but just like your mama. Good for your back so maybe think of [my son], my first abortion. I was like, damn, I'da had two kids before I was even 18 years old. So you know, that in my mind, like dang, I'm bad. I am probably just like my mom.

Over one year following the death of her son, Veronica had a second child and ended her relationship with her children's father shortly after. Facing the financial pressures of being a single mother, she began shoplifting to provide for herself and her daughter. She also applied for and received public housing and moved into her first apartment. Less than one year later, her former partner was murdered during an

⁸ Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is the unexplained death, usually during sleep, of a seemingly healthy baby less than a year old. SIDS is sometimes known as crib death because the infants often die in their cribs.

attempted robbery, leaving Veronica with additional financial burdens as she was no longer able to receive financial assistance from her child's father. Additionally, Veronica was dealing with another pregnancy with her new partner who turned out to be verbally and physically abusive.

Unlike men, women who experience childhood victimization have a higher risk of adulthood victimization by a romantic partner (Desai et al. 2002). For many formerly incarcerated women, adult victimization such as domestic violence is part of their pathway to criminal justice involvement. In fact, incarcerated women are more likely to report intimate partner violence compared to women in the general population (Richie 1996). One report found that 77 percent of women in jail report experiencing intimate partner violence (Swavola et al. 2016). Domestic violence is not the only adult victimization that justice-involved women experience. One study found that 54.5 percent of incarcerated women in the sample reported being raped, 11.5 percent reported being gang raped, and 39 percent reported being sexually assaulted by an authority figure in adulthood (McDaniels-Wilson and Belknap 2008).

While Veronica did not discuss any adult sexual victimization, she discussed various romantic partners who were verbally and physically abusive. She describes the violence she experienced with her third child's father:

Me and Will got into it so bad to where we were fighting, breaking stuff in the house and everything. And I was fucking six month pregnant with Sasha and it

was like we had physical fights so, girl, the housing authority people ended up coming to my house the next morning and they was like, cuz of the complaints and all this, that and third, they were putting me out.

What is striking about Veronica's account is that her experience with domestic violence led to the loss of a social safety net in public housing. This aligns with Lapidus's (2002) study of the housing discrimination experienced by victims of domestic violence.

Moreover, in North Carolina, anyone evicted from Section 8 housing is ineligible to apply for housing until three years have passed (Anon 2019). For Veronica, losing access to public housing placed her in a more economically vulnerable position. Given her low-wage job as a hospital employee, she could not afford housing without government assistance. Thus, she temporarily moved into a women's protective shelter with her daughter to receive emergency services. However, her time at the women's shelter would be short lived. Because her former partner was murdered, Veronica was part of an active police investigation. This meant that law enforcement officers would occasionally call or visit her at the shelter for additional information. These visits by law enforcement posed an issue for management at the women's shelter and ultimately resulted in Veronica being asked to leave:

It was just an investigation but that right there caused a lot more problems in my life, coming there cuz like sure enough, the moment they left there, I was already there, now about, almost a month, them coming there, that's what got me put out

of the shelter. Girl, as soon as they left, the caseworker, the damn sup, everybody on the shift came over there like we don't do this. This place is like for underground women and all this, that and the third, and they told me I couldn't even come there no more.

This would not be Veronica's last experience with being asked to leave a shelter. Years later and with four children, Veronica would once again be homeless and have to reside in a shelter. Only this time, she would be in the shelter for less than one day before being asked to leave.

Veronica: I ended up going to the shelter. So I ended up going to [omitted]... The [omitted] put me out. I did not know you couldn't cook your own food. They put me out the same day I came. And they put me out at 3:30 in the morning. Yeah.

Interviewer: For cooking your own food?

Veronica: Uh huh. Yeah, you don't, you supposed to cook, they took my food stamp card, everything. You have to be there 90 days before you have access to your own stuff.

Interviewer: Gotcha

Veronica: And I didn't know none of this so I'm in there cooking crab legs, honey, like It's a normal thing. Girl, didn't know you couldn't cook in here? What you got a stove in there for if I couldn't cook? You know, I didn't understand the

definition of that [omitted] but they did, they put me out at 3:30 in the morning. I promise you, did. Had them call social services on me.

Interviewer: With your kids?

Veronica: They called social service on me. Uh huh. Telling me I didn't have nowhere to go with my kids.

Black women who experience domestic violence are especially vulnerable to becoming homeless (Lapidus 2002). This is because Black women already experience racism in housing markets (Galster 1990), and gender and race-based income disparities (Cawthorne 2008; National Partnership for Women & Families 2019). After some time, Veronica found housing through an emergency shelter program. The program offered her two years of housing for her and her children and enrolled her in a job readiness program. However, given her limited sources of income, Veronica continued shoplifting as a means of economic survival and was eventually arrested. Following her arrest, she also learned that she had outstanding warrants for prior shoplifting incidents, including a felony charge of obtaining property by false pretenses. Veronica was convicted and received a sentence of community service.

Veronica only expected to live at the shelter for two years. However, her criminal record with a felony conviction prevented her from finding housing. During this time, Veronica became pregnant and entered a new romantic relationship that also turned violent. The domestic abuse continued throughout her pregnancy, and her daughter was

born with poor brain functioning. Because domestic violence increases the risk of soft tissue injury to the fetus or fetal death (Cook and Bewley 2008), physicians in the hospital speculated that her daughter's development was tied to the physical abuse Veronica experienced. Nearly four months after her birth, her daughter was hospitalized and remained in the hospital until she passed away approximately two months later. During this time, Veronica attained housing with the help of a former romantic partner with whom she had rekindled a relationship. She struggled with employment, cycling in and out of destructive romantic relationships, and remained economically vulnerable. She would eventually be arrested, convicted, and incarcerated for conspiracy for aiding her partner in breaking and entering to commit larceny. The time Veronica spent in jail following this conviction caused her to fall behind in rent and lead to another eviction.

As Veronica continues telling me her life story, I glance down and notice that she is wearing an ankle monitor. She informs me she is currently on probation and describes her latest involvement with the criminal justice system. She tells me that after her last release from jail; she found new housing through another former romantic partner. During this time, she also got a higher paying job at a country club but was terminated less than one month later after her employers performed a background check which produced her prior felony records. With a new school year approaching for her children, Veronica felt desperate to provide them with clothing, shoes, and school supplies. Thus,

she resorted to shoplifting and using fraudulent checks to provide those items. As a result, she was arrested for obtaining property by false pretenses and forgery. Veronica was convicted, and given her prior convictions, the judge sentenced her to six months in prison. During Veronica's time in prison, her children were placed with her now 84-year-old maternal grandmother, who was also living in poverty. After serving her sentence, she was released and put on parole for nearly three years.

While Veronica was able to pay her court fines, pass her drug tests, and attend all of her parole meetings, she violated her parole after two years when she was stopped and ticketed on her way to work for driving without a license. Her parole officer sent her back to jail for her parole violations. At her court hearing, based on the recommendation of her parole officer, the prosecutor recommended that Veronica complete the rest of her parole behind bars and receive an additional sentence for driving without a license. Instead, the judge opted to place Veronica under house arrest (with an ankle monitor), thus allowing her the opportunity to return to work and care for her children. While her role as a mother and primary caregiver largely influenced the judge to give Veronica a less severe punishment, her role as a sole caregiver was also the impetus for much of her criminal justice involvement in adulthood. Because women are expected to be financially responsible for their children (Hays 1998), Veronica consistently felt pressured to provide for her children even when the means of providing increased her risk of additional criminal justice involvement.

Veronica's attempts to receive institutional assistance were often limited, entrapping her in an economically vulnerable position. For instance, Veronica describes how her recent application for Medicaid was unsuccessful because she could not provide the states child support enforcement agency with information about her children's father's whereabouts:

You can go through that whole little process but when it comes to you asking questions, where they at, and stuff like that, you can't answer so I put NA to everything but that's not good enough for them. They want me to, how I supposed to tell you somebody I ain't seen in five or six years? All I can do is give your name and you do your research and do your homework. I did my part. But instead, you wanta stop my Medicaid because you all can't find out no information that I can't even give you...Like the system shouldn't be like that at all but that's the way it is.

Veronica's experience with Medicaid is common for many single-parents who rely on government-funded programs. This is because of child support requirements that state the non-custodial parent's private health insurance be used for coverage when available. It requires the custodial parent to provide information about the whereabouts of the non-custodial parent for this rule to be enforced. While children cannot be denied Medicaid coverage, parents who fail to comply can be denied benefits (Roberts 2003). Although Veronica has had no contact with her children's fathers in recent years,

her perceived inability to cooperate led to her being punished by being denied Medicaid. Moreover, Medicaid is especially critical to Black women who are more likely to hold low-wage jobs (Toossi and Morisi 2017).

2.5 Discussion

Existing research on gendered pathways to criminal justice involvement points to childhood victimization, substance abuse, mental illness, and other personal factors as antecedents of incarceration (CASA 2010; Dehart et al. 2014; Gilfus 2002; Siegel and Williams 2003; Simkins et al. 2004; Widom 2000). This research highlights how these personal risk factors intersect to result in women's arrests, convictions, and imprisonment. Although the role of these intersecting factors is crucial for understanding why women become entangled in the justice system, exploring these factors independently without examining the role of structural factors does not thoroughly interrogate all the components that shape women's pathways. Thus, I argue that the emphasis on women's individual factors in the pathways perspective obscures the role of structural institutions and inequality. For instance, while many studies examine the relationship between childhood victimization and incarceration, few studies highlight how institutional responses to childhood victimization shape women's pathways to prison. Furthermore, studies do not thoroughly examine how inadequate institutional support during adulthood uniquely contributes to women's criminal justice involvement and entrapment. Using the case of Veronica Miller, I highlight women's

experiences with victimization and entrapment and institutional responses to their survival strategies. I argue that institutions play a critical role in women's pathways by; criminalizing the survival strategies of girls, exacerbating economic marginalization, and punishing victims of domestic violence. I contend that institutional responses are both gendered and racialized, which further marginalizes an already vulnerable population of women.

3. Maternal Identity Construction Among Incarcerated Women

3.1 Introduction

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, approximately 52 percent of state prisoners and 63 percent of federal prisoners report having at least one minor child (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). These men and women are parents to the nearly 2.7 million children with an incarcerated parent (Glaze and Maruschak 2008; The Pew Charitable Trusts 2010). While men have a higher cumulative risk of being incarcerated, there has been a drastic increase in the number of incarcerated women (The Sentencing Project 2016), and many of these women are parents to minor children. Specifically, about 51 and 56 percent of women in state and federal prison report being a parent to a minor child who lived with them prior to incarceration (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). Moreover, many women plan to resume their roles as primary caregivers of their children once released (Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999), and motherhood has been found to be a critical aspect of desistance and successful reintegration (Brown and Bloom 2009; Leverentz 2014; Sharpe 2015). Thus, it is not surprising that researchers are interested in understanding how women navigate parenting and negotiate their maternal identity during incarceration and reentry (Easterling 2012; Gurusami 2018; Loper et al. 2009).

The dominant model of “good” mothering is rooted in the ideology of intensive mothering (Hays 1998). Intensive mothering requires mothers to invest large amounts of

time, money, and resources into appropriate child-rearing which is constructed as “child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive” (Hays 1998:8). However, the standards and practices required of this ideology reflect White middle-class ideals and are often unattainable for certain groups because of their socioeconomic class, educational attainment, racial/ethnic group, and sexual orientation (Collins 1994). These marginalized mothers attempt to construct alternative mothering ideologies that are aligned with their structural position (Elliott, Powell, and Brenton 2015; Hequembourg and Farrell 1999; Meadows-Oliver 2003). One group of women that struggle with meeting the ideals of intensive mothering are incarcerated mothers.

Compared to women in the general population, incarcerated mothers are less educated, have lower pre-incarceration incomes, and are single-mothers (Glaze and Maruschak 2008; Rabuy and Kopf 2015; Snell and Morton 1991). Incarcerated mothers also confront the stigma of criminality and lack of physical custody while in prison, which prevents them from engaging in standard intensive mothering practices and renders hegemonic ideals of motherhood unattainable (Aiello and McQueeney 2016; Bemiller 2010; Brown and Bloom 2009; Garcia-Hallett 2017). While most incarcerated women are mothers, prior scholarship has yet to fully interrogate how incarcerated mothers construct their maternal identities against dominant ideologies. This exploration of maternal identity construction among incarcerated women is valuable as

scholars contend that individuals with “troubled identities” consistently engage in identity work to move beyond negative social judgements associated with one or more of their identities (Gubrium and Holstein 2001).

To this end, this study uses retrospective accounts of formerly incarcerated mothers to explore how mothers define and construct their maternal identities while imprisoned. I examine how beliefs about motherhood and mothering behaviors align with—or—depart from the dominant ideology of intensive mothering. Incarcerated mothers attempt to escape negative evaluations of their maternal identity by engaging in defensive othering where they redefine “good” mothering in contrast to other more stigmatized incarcerated mothers (i.e., “bad” mothers). I also find that in response to their maternal identity being challenged, many mothers in the study adopt aspects of the intensive mothering ideology available to them while incarcerated. Specifically, mothers select other women who fit the dominant narrative of good mothers (i.e., heterosexual, nuclear families, financially stable) to act as substitute caregivers for their children. Additionally, mothers attempt to engage in “good” mothering despite their physical and financial constraints. Finally, mothers engage in self-sacrificial practices around mother-child visitation that align with the sacrificial behavioral expectations of intensive mothering.

3.2 Literature Review

3.2.1 Hegemonic Ideologies of Motherhood

Mothering is a “historically and culturally variable relationship in which one individual nurtures and cares for another” (Glenn 1994:4). Mothering is also viewed as a key aspect of women’s identity and social experiences (Ferraro and Moe 2003; Hays 1998). In society, mothers are both highly esteemed and criticized for their life conditions and parenting choices (Hays 1998). Currently, the social construction of motherhood dictates that women are inherently caring and self-sacrificing (Ferraro and Moe 2003; Hays 1998). This understanding of motherhood is rooted in Hays’ (1998) notion of intensive mothering where good mothering is child-centered, labor intensive, emotionally encompassing, and financially costly. Essentially, good mothers invest large amounts of money, time, and energy into raising their children. The ideology of intensive mothering also requires that: 1) mothering occurs within nuclear heterosexual families, 2) women are the primary caregivers of their children, 3) the act of mothering is solely performed by biological or adoptive mothers, and 4) when mothers are unavailable, another women act as a substitute caregiver (Arendell 2000; Easterling 2012; Hays 1998). Despite the rise of women in the formal labor market, this ideology prioritizes mothering over all other forms of work, and views motherhood as women’s greatest source of fulfilment (see Easterling 2012).

Despite being viewed as universal, this dominant ideology of motherhood is rooted in race- and class-based contexts (Collins 1994; Hays 1998). Thus, intensive mothering standards and practices are often restrictive and impractical for different

groups of women, such as non-White and working-class mothers. These mothers cannot spend ample amounts of time with their children because of work and often lack the financial means to provide certain material resources (Elliott et al. 2015; Romagnoli and Wall 2012). Scholars have also argued that dominant ideologies obscures the labor of mothering, overlooks the resources required to meet such standards, and stigmatizes mothers unable to conform (Granja, da Cunha, and Machado 2015). Feminist scholars have attempted to address this by arguing that motherhood is not a fixed role but one influenced by historical and sociopolitical elements, material resources, and different beliefs about motherhood (Arendell 2000; Collins 1994). Studies have also expanded ideas about motherhood to include the perspectives and experiences of minority and working-class women and demonstrate how dominant ideologies are navigated by members of marginal groups (Blum and Deussen 1996; Collins 1994; Hequembourg and Farrell 1999).

In spite of this, mothers from various racial, class, and social backgrounds remain aware of the dominant ideology and feel compelled to adapt intensive mothering practices (Blair-Loy 2009; Elliott et al. 2015; McCormack 2005). Aside from racial/ethnic minorities and working-class mothers, there are other groups of mothers who are overlooked, diminished, and stigmatized for failing to meet the White middle-class ideology of intensive mothering. Examples include teenage mothers (Romagnoli and Wall 2012) and mothers who are sex workers (Dodsworth 2014). Another group of

mothers who are undeniably excluded from the dominant ideology of mothering and who have received less attention in the scholarship of intensive mothering are incarcerated mothers.

3.2.2 Mothering Behind Bars

For different groups of mothers, parenting is complicated by social, political, and economic obstacles that prevent them from fulfilling the social obligations prescribed by an intensive mothering ideology. Incarcerated mothers are often stigmatized, viewed as bad mothers, and encounter a great deal of social disapproval because of their inability to meet hegemonic ideals of mothering (Brown and Bloom 2009; Haney 2010). For incarcerated women, their social position prior to incarceration and the conditions of confinement create major obstacles for implementing intensive mothering. Specifically, incarcerated women are typically poor (Rabuy and Kopf 2015), less educated than women in the general population (Harlow 2003), and about 42 percent of them report living in single-parent households prior to incarceration (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). They also have histories of sexual and physical abuse (Gilfus 2002; McDaniels-Wilson and Belknap 2008), and face an array of mental illness and substance abuse challenges (Gullapalli 2019; Gunn et al. 2018; Wesely and Dewey 2018). Moreover, many studies suggest that incarcerated women's crimes are often motivated by their need to financially provide for their children (see Ferraro and Moe 2003). Essentially, for incarcerated mothers, their pre-prison conditions were marked by economic insecurity

and social vulnerability that challenged their ability to fulfill dominant ideologies of mothering (Cunha and Granja 2013), and these challenges were further complicated by their confinement.

One of the greatest challenges incarcerated mothers face is coping with the separation from their children (Dodge and Pogrebin 2001; Loper 2006; Snyder, Carlo, and Coats Mullins 2001). As women are typically the primary caregivers for their children prior to incarceration, they are more likely to have their children placed into foster care compared to incarcerated fathers whose children typically remain with their mothers (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). In fact, 88 percent of incarcerated fathers report their children being with their other parent, compared to 37 percent of incarcerated mothers. Even when the children of incarcerated mothers are not placed into foster care, many of them still experience a change in residence, as 45 percent of them are placed with a grandparent and 23 percent with other relatives (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). For incarcerated mothers, physical separation from their children produces stress and anxiety, loss of contact, loss of custody, and fear for their children's safety (Few and Arditti 2008; Houck and Loper 2002). Beliefs and pressures about primary caregiving responsibilities also make mothering in jail/prison a distressing and anxiety-producing endeavor for women (Poehlmann 2005). Furthermore, there are greater social pressures on women than there are on men to meet the normative expectations of parenting during their incarceration and after their release (Opsal and Foley 2013).

Incarcerated mothers also face several challenges to their maternal identity, status, and role. First, their criminal label violates traditional gender stereotypes and social ideals about womanhood and motherhood (Chesney-Lind 1997; Enos 2001). Specifically, stereotypes of criminality suggest that criminals are strong and aggressive, which contradicts stereotypes of femininity as weak and submissive (Steffensmeier and Allan 1996). By violating ideas of womanhood, women automatically violate dominant ideologies of motherhood. Second, parenting in prison involves attempting to remain in children's lives by actively engaging in traditional parenting activities such as emotional support, financial provision, discipline, and education (Easterling 2012; Swisher and Waller 2008). Maintaining traditional parental functions while incarcerated is challenging because of a lack of physical access to one's children, limited financial opportunities, and the inability to be involved in the day-to-day aspects of children's lives (Easterling 2012). Incarcerated mothers are often not in close physical proximity to their children due to the distance between correctional facilities and women's prior residence (Hairston 2003), and this lack of proximity also violates the ideals of motherhood. Third, besides being unable to engage in traditional parenting activities, incarcerated women do not have physical custody of their children which further compromises their ability to be labelled "good mothers," as social constructions of motherhood assign women as the primary custodians of their children (Tangir, Cohen, and Peled 2017).

3.2.3 Troubled Identities and Attempts at Reconstruction

Identity can be defined as the composition of the self, based on the meanings that individuals attach to their multiple roles in society (Stryker and Burke 2000). While all individuals hold multiple identities, these identities are not equal and are organized by their position in the salience hierarchy (Barnes and Stringer 2014). The hierarchy creates conflicting identities and roles, and, as a result, certain identities are constructed as social problems. Gubrium and Holstein's (2001) notion of a "troubled identity" refers to a self whose lived experiences have been constructed as a social problem. For incarcerated women who fall outside the established norms of good mothering, their troubled identity rests at the intersection of being *incarcerated* and a *mother*.

Research consistently shows that belonging to diminished social groups and groups viewed as social problems can harm individuals' social identities (Dietert and Dentice 2009; Lundberg et al. 2011; Reutter et al. 2009). Thus, studies suggest that various groups of marginalized mothers often challenge the stigma resulting from hegemonic standards that render their maternal identity a social problem (Abrams and Curran 2010; Gueta and Addad 2013; Tangir et al. 2017). Examples include non-custodial mothers (Bemiller 2005), mothers with postpartum depression (Abrams and Curran 2010), and mothers dealing with substance abuse issues (Gueta and Addad 2013). While incarcerated mothers are not the only group of stigmatized mothers or mothers with troubled identities, they are a highly marginalized group within society. For

incarcerated mothers, their maternal identities are troubled because they violate dominant ideologies of motherhood by being incarcerated. Thus, they must manage their conflicting identity as “criminals” and mothers (Barnes and Stringer 2014).

Being incarcerated is rife with stigma and public judgement about criminality, and this judgement creates challenges for women attempting to reconcile a “criminal” and “good mother” identity. Because of the challenges of troubled identity, Gubrium and Holstein’s (2001) suggest that individuals engage in identity work to challenge and redefine their diminished social identities. Identity work refers to individual and/or collective actions people take to give meaning to themselves and others (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). Because incarcerated women’s maternal identities become troubled identities, it is likely that they engage in identity work to develop novel strategies to reconstruct their maternal identity. Essentially, they attempt to reestablish themselves as “good mothers” (Granja et al. 2015). However, incarcerated mothers may face significant challenges to developing strategies as conflicts arise between dominant ideologies of mothering practices and the parenting practices that can be achieved in jail or prison (Granja et al. 2015). Specifically, correctional facilities typically lack the programming and policies to support parent-child relationships (Hairston 2002). Therefore, women’s attempts at reconstructing their maternal identities occur under the restrictions and constraints of incarceration.

3.3 This Study

Despite the stress-inducing nature of mothering behind bars (Few and Arditti 2008; Houck and Loper 2002), many women view motherhood as a key factor of success during the incarceration and reentry period (Bemiller 2010; Heidemann et al. 2016; Shamaï and Kochal 2008). While there is a growing body of scholarship that investigates the challenges of mothering behind bars (Barnes and Stringer 2014; Celinska and Siegel 2010; Easterling 2012; Enos 2001; Ferraro and Moe 2003; Snyder et al. 2001), fewer studies explore the maternal identity construction of incarcerated women. Existing studies suggest that women use stigma-reducing strategies such as: 1) arguing that their criminal offenses are rooted in economic marginalization (Ferraro and Moe 2003); 2) viewing their incarceration as a period to treat drug and alcohol addictions, which they view as the underlying cause of their inability to perform “good” mothering (Baker and Carson 1999); and 3) engaging in oppositional identity work, which involves subordinate groups resisting the stigma imposed by dominant groups by contesting and redefining their identities to be viewed as honorable rather than deviant (Aiello and McQueeney 2016). Incarcerated women also consistently work to maintain the salience of their maternal identity (see Barnes and Stringer 2014).

Given the limited research in this area, the aim of this study is to investigate how incarcerated women construct their maternal identities by examining women’s attempts at alignments with or detachment from dominant ideologies of mothering. This study

builds on prior research about marginalized mothers' navigation and negotiation of their maternal identities under a dominant ideology that interprets "good" mothering as intensive mothering. The primary research question is: How do incarcerated mothers construct normative maternal identities under the constraints of incarceration? This study explores the identity work women engage in to reconstruct their maternal identities and establish themselves as "good mothers."

3.4 Data and Methods

The present study examines the identity construction of incarcerated mothers through retrospective in-depth interviews. The data comes from 40 interviews with formerly incarcerated mothers, primarily in North Carolina. Participants in the study were recruited through: 1) flyers placed in or provided to service-based and reentry organizations and 2) flyers placed within local businesses (e.g., hair salons, restaurants, grocery stores) that women were more likely to frequent. Snowball sampling and referrals were also used to identify subsequent participants. To be eligible to take part in this study, mothers had to: 1) be previously incarcerated in jail or prison for a minimum of 2 months, 2) be a parent at the time of incarceration, and 3) be the primary caregiver of their child prior to incarceration.

I conducted 32 of the 40 interviews, and an undergraduate research assistant conducted the remaining interviews. Two interviews took place over the phone, and the remaining interviews took place in person. All interviews occurred between May 2018

and July 2019, and participants received \$40 USD in compensation. Interviews primarily took place in participants' homes; however, I conducted some interviews at local reentry organizations, public libraries, and coffee shops. Participants completed a short demographic survey at the start of each interview. Interviews covered a range of topics including parenting while incarcerated, selecting caregivers, relationships with caregivers, and familial reunification following release. For this article, I focus exclusively on the portions of the interviews which explore aspects of mothering from prison. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity, and potentially identifying information such as the names of children, romantic partners, and caregivers were changed and/or omitted.

Participants ranged in age from 23 to 62, with an average age of 38 (see table 1). Approximately 58 percent of participants identified as Black, 40 percent identified as White, and about 2 percent identified as Native American. Ten percent of women did not have a high school degree, 72.5 percent had a high school diploma or GED equivalent, 10 percent had an associate degree, and 7.5 percent had a bachelor's degree or more. In terms of marital status, at the time of the study, 60 percent of women were single and had never been married, 7.5 percent were currently married, 25 percent were separated or divorced, and 7.5 percent were widowed. The average age of first birth was 21 years old, and on average women had about two children when they were incarcerated. In terms of their criminal justice histories, participants averaged about ten

arrests and six convictions, and the average length of prison sentences was about two years. Some women could not give an accurate self-report of their criminal history because they have incurred many arrests, convictions, and short jail sentences, and instead provided estimates of their criminal justice contact. While women were not asked to disclose their criminal charge on the demographic survey, most women discussed being charged with drug- or property-related crimes during the interview.

The interviews were semi-structured, meaning I used a detailed interview guide but allowed the interviews to follow the topical trajectory of participants. A professional transcriptionist or I transcribed all interviews, and I used NVivo software to analyze the interview transcripts. I used line-by-line coding to develop codes to represent recurring themes in the data. I then analyzed the transcripts iteratively to allow the ongoing revision of themes based on preliminary findings and theory (Small 2009).

3.5 Findings

My analysis of participants' accounts produced four recurring themes representing women's attempts at reconstructing their maternal identities. These themes were then recoded to 1) defensive othering, 2) selecting caregivers who fit hegemonic ideals of motherhood, and 3) performing good mothering, and 4) maternal sacrifices and visitation. Below, I discuss my findings. In the first section, I examine how women discuss other similarly incarcerated mothers, and their focus on the types of crimes "other" women commit and what type of mothers they were prior to incarceration. The

second section explores the criteria women use to select caregivers and their rationale for their selection. The final section highlights the accounts given by women about avoiding in-person visitation with their children. I posit that the accounts given by women illustrate their attempts at identity reconstruction as they try to navigate dominant ideologies of motherhood under the constraints of incarceration.

3.5.1 Defensive Othering and “Bad Mothers”

Many participants framed their maternal identity in opposition to other incarcerated women they viewed as “bad mothers.” It is not unusual for individuals to construct their identity by drawing a contrast to an “other,” particularly when those individuals belong to marginalized groups. Schwalbe and colleagues (2000) argue that many individuals and groups engage in “defensive othering,” whereby they accept the validity of a devalued identity but argue that the identity applies to other members of the group and not themselves. Prior studies have explored the role of defensive othering in identity construction among female athletes (Ezzell 2009), non-religious parents in the bible-belt (McClure 2017) and victims of domestic abuse (Hannem, Langan, and Stewart 2015). Participants in this study attempted to reconstruct their maternal identities by engaging in defensive othering by accepting the negative labels associated with incarcerated mothers but suggesting that label is reserved for the types of mothers who engage in specific criminal behaviors.

For example, Felicia, a 37-year old mother of three, attempts to construct her maternal identity by drawing distinctions between herself and incarcerated mothers with substance abuse issues. When asked about other mothers, she states:

Like this one lady when I was like where you kid at? like dang you had a freaking meth in your house, you got two kids right there. And the reason why the cops came because you could smell it up the street. So if you could smell it up the street, your kid in the house with all that fumes and stuff just as high as you is. Like how can you do, like why would you subject them to that?

Felicia attempts to distance herself from women she considers bad mothers. She does this by highlighting their drug use and the potential harm this could cause to their children. For instance, when asked about her own criminal conviction, Felicia prefaces her response by stating, "I wasn't selling drugs, got arrested selling drugs or robbing a bank or you know, stabbing somebody or something." Felicia makes it a point to state that she is not a drug user or a violent person, both of which would violate hegemonic ideals of womanhood and motherhood. Felicia later discloses that she was convicted of armed robbery and burglary, but she emphasizes that she was only involved in a physical altercation with another woman and stresses that the woman was dishonest to law enforcement about what took place during the altercation. Felicia once again distinguishes herself from mothers she viewed as more violent and criminal.

Other women also distance themselves from mothers who struggled with substance abuse, especially when women's substance abuse resulted in them losing custody of their children. Although none of the participants had physical custody of their children because of their confinement, participants marked clear distinctions between themselves and women whose custody was revoked by the state for reasons other than their incarceration. In the following exchange, Dawn, a 45-year-old mother, explains why she opted to not take part in prison programming that focused on parenting. Her account highlights the distinctions she draws between herself and other incarcerated mothers, who in her view, needed parenting programs.

Interviewer: You mentioned some of the, like the classes you took at [omitted] and everything. Were there ever any like parenting classes or family classes that were offered?

Dawn: I didn't need them.

Interviewer: So who typically would take those classes? What type of women?

Dawn: People who, who kids got taken from them and that's how they ended up in prison.

Interviewer: Gotcha.

Dawn: Like drug users, doing stuff in front of them to the point they had to be taken and it was a part of their incarceration...

Interviewer: Did women in prison ever like share of talk about like parenting or what was going on with their kids or anything like that?

Dawn: No. They're the sorriest women ever in prison. You only have 20 like me that really cared for their kids.

Participant: What do you mean, they were the sorriest women...

Dawn: They were drug, I ain't gonna say they was sorry because they did drugs but most of them were drug users. They didn't even know their kids. Like their mom might've had custody already. Most of them people lost their kids already to drugs.

Dawn suggests that her role as the primary caregiver for her children prior to being incarcerated and not having substance abuse issues demonstrates her parental fitness.

Dawn engages in defensive othering by suggesting that the "sorriest" mothers were the type whose substance abuse issues had caused them to lose custody of their children prior to their incarceration. Dawn does not reject the idea that women in prison are "bad mothers," instead she supports the negative labels of incarcerated mothers and then distances herself from other incarcerated mothers.

However, it is not only women without drug and alcohol addictions that engage in defensive othering. Incarcerated women with prior substance abuse issues also engage in defensive othering in an effort to reconstruct their maternal identities despite their violations of dominant ideologies of motherhood. Inez, a mother of two who

served fifteen months in prison on charges related to her substance abuse, similarly distances herself from “bad mothers.” Unlike Dawn and Felicia, while Inez cannot construct her identity as a good mother based on not abusing drugs, she can do so by emphasizing that her children never witnessed her drug use.

Inez: My kids knew that I got high, but my kids never saw me get high.

Interviewer: Quick question, is that important? Is that an important distinction?

Inez: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. So tell me about that.

Inez: I know some parents that actually smoke crack or marijuana with their kids.

I draw the, for me, I have to draw the line there because it's respect me.

Inez's account shows that defensive othering can occur at various levels. While Inez cannot distance herself as a non-drug user, she can still distance herself from “bad mothers” because of her ability to protect her children by shielding them from her drug use. Inez also emphasizes the respect that her children have for her as a mother, despite knowing about her drug addiction. For Inez, protecting her image as a mother was also a critical part of her constructing her identity as a good mother. She later explains, “You know, it's one thing for my children to have known I was getting high than actually see it, cuz it's two different things... Just to expose them and leaving that image in their head for their mother, them seeing their mother getting high. That's something I never wanted.” For Inez, the consideration of her children in when and where she used drugs

demonstrated her ability to do what was in the best interest of her children. Thus, Inez can contrast herself to other incarcerated mothers she viewed as deserving of the “bad mother” label.

Other participants engage in defensive othering by contrasting themselves to women who commit violent or sex crimes involving children. For example, when describing a disagreement with another incarcerated woman about the moral hierarchy of crimes, Felicia stresses her beliefs about crimes involving children being one of the worst crimes a mother can commit. She describes the argument in the following exchange:

Felicia: But like the girl, the black girl, she boiled her baby. Like you took a newborn baby, you put a freaking baby in a...

Interviewer: She did what to her baby?

Felicia: Boiled it. Boiled her baby. So you took a baby and put a baby in some boiling hot water. Like it was an infant... But you can look at your baby do that, and your baby looking at you trying to understand why would my mama do, you know? And so, me and her got in an argument and she talking about it, I'm like I don't even want to hear it. And she like no crime is greater than another. Yeah it is! Like you can't judge me. Yeah, I can! As a parent I can judge you for that. Which I feel like I can, I mean as a parent, I felt like I could.

Felicia's argument illustrates her disapproval of the other woman's actions, which she believes violates the tenets of good mothering. Similarly, Linda, a 31-year-old mother who served over eight years in prison for financial crimes related to supporting her substance abuse, discusses the types of women in prison she distanced herself from. She explains, "there's one girl in there who um starved her, starved her like two-year-old little boy and I mean he was so hungry they found rocks in the stomach." Like Felicia, Linda's story highlights her distancing herself from other mothers based on the types of crimes committed, particularly when those crimes involved women's children. Both women engage in the defensive othering of other incarcerated mothers in order to draw distinctions between themselves and mothers who they view as being more deserving of being labelled "bad mothers." The findings expound upon the scholarship produced by other researchers who suggest that women often use comparative evaluations of other mothers who they deem to be in greater violation of good mothering (Edin and Kefalas 2011; Hardesty and Black 1999).

3.5.2 Selecting Normative Caregivers

A key tenet of intensive mothering is that good mothering requires women to protect and provide the best for their children (Hays 1998). This includes being fully accountable for their children's safety, well-being, and protection from potential risks (Elliott and Aseltine 2013; Hays 1998). While some mothers can meet these demands, there are many women who do not have the resources to fulfill this standard of

mothering. Studies find that mothers with limited resources strive to develop strategies that allow them to meet these standards of provision and protection (Blum 2007; Elliott and Aseltine 2013; Meadows-Oliver 2003). For incarcerated mothers, they are constrained from partaking in daily child-rearing activities, providing financial support, and providing safety for their children. Thus, for many women, the selection of a caregiver who will act as a proxy for the biological mother-child relationship is a crucial component of demonstrating good mothering. Participant accounts of their rationale for selecting specific caregivers highlight their attempts to replicate dominant ideologies about the types of women who are “good mothers.”

3.5.2.1 Creating the “Perfect” Family

For many participants, providing for and protecting their children meant selecting caregivers who could offer a traditional family structure. Prior studies indicate that conceptions of good mothers are based on married heterosexual women in traditional nuclear family units (Hays 1998). While only 40 percent of participants had ever been married and only about 8 percent were currently married, many participants embraced a traditional family model. When given the opportunity to select caregivers, their desire to grant their children access to a traditional nuclear family shaped participants’ decision. Monica, a divorced mother of two, explains why she selected her sister and her brother-in-law to act as her children’s caregivers:

...they was just like, a little perfect family. When they're with me, they're just with me but not with their daddy and the husband. But when they're there, it's like the full family—the mother, the father, and the kids. But with me, it's just the mother and the kids.

Several participants provided similar accounts for how they selected their children's caregivers. Marina explained her caregiver choice: "I sent them to my, my youngest sister and her husband. She was married to her husband at the time." For Marina, it appears that finding a caregiver who was a part of a traditional nuclear family unit was a relevant aspect of her caregiver selection. She later reveals that she wanted her children to have the opportunity to be a part of a two-parent household.

For participants who did not have couples in their network who were a part of a traditional nuclear family unit, they often selected female caregivers who still fit ideal constructions of good mothering. For example, Sharon describes the qualities of her aunt that led her to select her as her child's caregiver:

My aunt was a good aunt, like the Betty Crocker mama. She still is Betty Crocker all day. Makes things. Creates things. Bakes these beautiful cakes and all this stuff. I mean, she's just like ideal. She's like that picture-perfect mother.

Sharon suggests that her decision was based on the belief that her aunt fit within hegemonic ideals of womanhood and motherhood, making her the ideal substitute caregiver. Sharon's account highlights mothers' awareness of dominant standards about

what type of women make “good mothers.” It also demonstrates how incarcerated mothers may attempt to compensate for their violations of womanhood and motherhood by selecting caregivers who fit dominant ideals of good mothering.

As good mothering also includes the ability to financially provide for children, it is not surprising that participant accounts indicate that part of their selection process involved choosing caregivers with greater financial resources. Many incarcerated women are working class or working poor (Rabuy and Kopf 2015); thus, financial stability is a metric used to select caregivers. For Monica, besides her sister belonging to a traditional household, she also highlights her sister’s financial stability as a justification for choosing her to be the caregiver. She explains, “Yeah. My sister and her husband, they did very well financially. And they didn’t, they didn’t have to go to social service for any help or support.” Similarly, Sharon describes another reason she chose her aunt to be the caregiver. She states, “Yeah, my aunt’s very well-to-do. She lives in [omitted] at the beach and I knew Lizzie would love that life and she does.”

Poor women and women receiving government assistance are often stigmatized and labelled as bad mothers because of their inability to financially care for their children. When compounded by incarceration, the bad mother label becomes unavoidable for this group of women. I argue that incarcerated mothers navigate this label and reconstruct their identity as good mothers by selecting caregivers who fit within hegemonic ideals of good mothering due to their nuclear family units and

financial stability. In doing so, they can demonstrate their care and prioritization of their children despite their confinement.

3.5.2.2 Protecting Children from Abuse

Intensive mothering requires mothers to be solely accountable for the safety and outcomes of their children. Prior studies suggest that for marginalized women, protecting their children often involves reducing their chances of abuse, and for female children this means reducing their risk of sexual abuse (Elliott and Aseltine 2013; Gurusami 2018). Many of the participants in this study draw on this tenet of intensive mothering. Dawn, who served nine months in prison, describes her reservations about her husband being the primary caregiver for her daughter while she was incarcerated. She reveals that her reservations ultimately led her to have her daughter depart from home to live with her sister in another city while she was incarcerated. She states:

My son would stay home with his dad, but my daughter is not his biological child...I didn't want her there. I mean, without me. He never presented his self as being like that but it's just the mother I am...I wanted my sister to keep my daughter in [omitted] which she did.

For Dawn, despite her confinement, separation from her children, and limited ability to traditionally parent, part of the construction of her maternal identity while incarcerated was rooted in protecting her children. With her daughter, this meant

attending to her perceived sexual vulnerability. She goes on to explain that her daughter's physical development was a key factor in her decision:

She had a shape for them, one, and she was having her cheeks out. And she was looking older anyway. She's tall, real pretty. And I was worried about her being in the house with two men that weren't her father, I don't care. [My husband], he might've raised her since a baby but that's not her blood father and I can't rest in here if she was home.

For Black mothers seeking to protect their children from sexual abuse, their decisions are largely influenced by controlling images that hypersexualize Black girls and women (Collins 2000). Dawn implies that her peace of mind rested on her ability to protect her daughter from potential sexual abuse, and much of her concern about the sexual vulnerability of her daughter came from her perceptions about her daughters physical development and appearance. The high percentage of participants in the study who themselves were victims of childhood sexual abuse (32.5%) may also explain their repeatedly espoused need to protect their children from potential sexual abuse.

Other participants also describe their lack of trust in their male partners as caregivers and their hesitation to leave their female children with their male partners, even when their male partner had been prominent father figures for many years.

Sharon, a White mother describes one of the reasons that she placed her daughter with her aunt instead of her then boyfriend, whom she later married:

See, when I went to prison, for some reason, I didn't trust Ben having her and I don't know why. Maybe I figured, maybe I figured something... I don't know what I figured. But I knew I was gonna be gone for quite a while, so I decided to let her stay with my aunt in [omitted].

While prior studies demonstrate that the children of incarcerated women are more likely to be placed with other family members (Glaze and Maruschak 2008), few studies explore what drives women's choices when selecting a caregiver. I argue that for many incarcerated women, their choice of caregivers are rooted in dominant ideologies of motherhood that dictate that mothering occurs within nuclear heterosexual family units; where women are the primary caregivers; and when biological mothers are unavailable, another woman acts as a substitute caregiver (Arendell 2000; Hays 1998). Participants in this study sought caregivers who fit within the dominant ideology and who could provide the financial resources required by intensive mothering. Women's caregiver choices were also based on their attempts to prevent the abuse of their children, particularly the sexual abuse of female children. While many incarcerated women's choices of caregivers are constrained and limited to other family members, women still have the agency to act within those constraints to select specific relatives. Their selections are often based on the caregiver's alignment with hegemonic notions of womanhood and motherhood.

3.5.3 Performing Good Mothering

Intensive mothering calls for women to put all of their time, energy, and money into child-rearing, and a fundamental tenet is that the needs of their children always come before their own (Hays 1998). It also requires that women be the central figure in their children's lives. For participants, being present and engaged in the day-to-day lives of their children was a critical aspect of how they defined the role as mothers. During a discussion about her views on parenting, Karen, a 31-year-old mother of three, explains that good mothers are "Always there. Always there, like how my mama is. My mama, she's always there. Even when you don't want her to be, she's there." To Karen, mothering involves having a consistent presence in the lives of your children. Karen's beliefs align with the ideals of intensive mothering where women are expected to be central figures in their children's upbringing. Given these beliefs, it is not surprising that many participants were adamant about remaining involved in the daily activities of their children's lives while incarcerated.

Like non-incarcerated mothers, many participants attempted to remain involved in the day-to-day activities of their children's lives, no matter how difficult, costly, or impractical this goal appeared to be. Dawn discusses how she managed to play a central role in her children's education while incarcerated by remaining in contact with their teachers and social workers through phone calls.

Dawn: I've done it from the social work office, so I never lost an opportunity to do anything with them...I just straight up said I need to come here every week and call my kids' school. I called my daughter's school every week and his.

Interviewer: And so did they know you were calling from prison?

Dawn: Yeah...They know me. They know that wasn't my life...I got to know them from the social worker office at the prison. But she only let me do it cuz she never had anybody to ask her to do it like that...I even talked to my son, they didn't do it much, but they let me, sometimes she'd call me up there. My son was cutting up real bad in school, so they called down there, let me speak to him. He calmed down. He was really, he was the one that was not taking this good.

Dawn's account not only demonstrates her efforts to remain involved in her children's schooling process, it also allows her to distinguish herself from other mothers in prison. Dawn points out that the prison social worker was amenable to her request as no other mothers had ever made any attempt to be involved in their child's education from prison. Dawn also states that individuals at her children's schools knew prison "wasn't [her] life," suggesting that her prior interactions with the school showed teachers she was not a "criminal" and different from uninvolved incarcerated mothers. Dawn also highlights the value of her role as a mother by suggesting that her son's misbehavior ceased once he could interact with her. This fits within the intensive mothering ideology where mothers are viewed as solely responsible for their children's behaviors and

outcomes (Hays 1998). Despite the barriers of confinement that participants encountered, many remained invested and found methods to remain a central figure in their children's daily activities.

Some participants could not remain involved in the daily lives of their children and thus found other ways to reconstruct and assert the maternal identities and roles. Diane, who was a single mother at the time of her incarceration asserted her maternal role by having gifts and other items created for her children using the money she earned from her prison job and commissary. She explains, "What I did is, I spent a lot of my time in prison having things made for her. You know, they knit everything, blankets, you know, little stuff for her, whenever she want, so that she would be able to keep it later on. And they still both have a lot of stuff." Diane is able to show her parental involvement by producing items that signal her role as a caretaker despite her physical confinement and financial constraints.

Good mothering involves not only being present but also fulfilling children's material needs. Although incarcerated women in North Carolina make approximately thirty-eight cents per hour (Sawyer 2017), for many participants, providing financially for their children remained a vital component of their maternal identity and role. Moreover, women engaged in self-sacrificial practices to ensure their children were

financially cared for. Veronica, a 28-year-old mother of five, explains why she rejected individuals' offers to contribute money to her commissary account.¹

Veronica: I didn't have no help, you know. I didn't want nobody send me nothing cuz I knew I had four kids here. I never, I survived off \$2.15 a week. I went and got a job...

Interviewer: Wait, you said you didn't want people to send you like commissary money?

Veronica: No, cuz I had kids and I knew my grandma needed help.

Interviewer: so you wanted them to send it to your grandma

Veronica: Yeah, I knew my grandma needed help...I knew she needed help with them kids and they was going to school, and my twins were starting daycare...But make a long story short...I survived on \$2.15 a week. So I did what I had to do.

For Veronica, parenting is connected to her ability to provide financially and her willingness to sacrifice to ensure that her children have financial resources. Veronica's inability to provide the financial security typically associated with White middle-class ideals of motherhood did not serve as a deterrent to her attempts to provide for her children. Instead, she emphasizes the financial sacrifices she made despite the challenges

¹ Prisoners are not allowed to possess money. If they are able to earn money by working a job in prison or their family sends them money, it goes into their personal prisoner trust fund. Most prisoners call this their "commissary money." (Prison Fellowship n.d.).

created by her imprisonment. Although not all participants needed to make financial sacrifices for their children while incarcerated, many engaged in other behaviors that demonstrated their willingness to sacrifice their personal interests for actions in their children's best interest.

3.5.4 “I don't want them to see me like that” – Maternal Sacrifices and Visitation

Approximately, 78 to 91 percent of state and federal prisoners have some form of contact with their children while incarcerated; however, most of this contact occurs via phone calls or letters (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). In terms of visitation, about 58 and 44 percent of individuals in state and federal prisons have no in-person visits from their children while incarcerated (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). While other forms of contact with children are important (Enos, 2001), in-person interactions are especially consequential for a family's ability to build normative family relationships (Tasca, Mulvey, and Rodriguez 2016). Prison visitation provides the only opportunity for incarcerated individuals, children, and caregivers to be reunited. Thus, it is not surprising that prior literature has focused on barriers to visitation such as distance and the economic costs to families for visits (Acevedo and Bakken 2001; Hairston 1991). This line of research operates from the assumption that women want to have in-person visitation with their children, but because of restrictions of the correctional facility, distance, and financial costs, cannot do so. However, I argue that this supposition is

flawed because women may opt out of in-person visitation with their children to enact the intensive mothering idea of self-sacrifice.

Mothers are tasked with attending to all of their children's emotional needs and always making decisions that are in the best interest of their children, even when decisions are not in the best interest of the mother (Hays 1998). Prior studies have explored how self-sacrificing behaviors are associated with dominant ideologies of good mothering (Glenn 1994; Hays 1998). For incarcerated women unable to engage in many acts of self-sacrifice for their children, they must have alternatives. I argue that for some incarcerated women, opting out of in-person visitations is a form of self-sacrificing behavior that allows them to engage in aspects of intensive mothering denied to them because of their confinement. Participants' accounts highlight how they prioritize sacrificing their desires as mothers for what they believe to be in the best interest of their children's development. The ability to engage in self-sacrificial practices also allows women the opportunity to construct positive maternal identities while incarcerated.

For many participants, performing good mothering meant worrying about the effects of prison visitation on their children's mental and physical health and ultimately rejecting visitation with their children. In fact, 52.5 percent of participants discussed opting out of visitation with their children for the duration of their incarceration.

Veronica explains how she arrived at her decision:

Man, I watched that so many times. I used to have to clean up the visitation area. I used to see kids go ballistic. When I say ballistic, running toward doorway, hit their head. Hit their head on the table. Scream and holler. Kicking and fussing. And I knew the way my kids' mentality was, they was gonna do the same thing.

For Veronica, declining visits with her children is a way of protecting them from the perceived dangers of visitation, and it is also one of the few acts of protection she can accomplish while incarcerated. This narrative emerges among many participants when explaining their decisions about their children's visitation. Fifty-one-year-old Alicia expresses similar concerns about the mental health of her daughter as a reason for declining visitation. When asked why she would not allow her then husband to bring her daughter for in-person visits, Alicia explains:

Alicia: She was too young.

Interviewer: Okay. What, what do you think that meant? What were you, what were your worries about her, because of her age, coming to visit?

Alicia: That it might traumatize her.

Similarly, Tonya, a 24-year-old mother of four, explains her decision about declining her children's caregivers' offer to bring them for visits despite her correctional facility being near her children:

I was just like, that and I didn't wanta bring my kids into that type of environment and that type of situation...I just know, I'm the type of parent that I

didn't wanta disturb their development, you know, and I just didn't want, I didn't want anything to try and compromise that, you know.

Prior research on parent-child visitation has found that for mothers, visitation is associated with numerous positive outcomes such as reductions in depression and anxiety (Poehlmann 2005). However, research on the impacts on children has produced mixed results (Poehlmann et al. 2010). Despite the inconclusive nature of research on the consequences of visitation for children, participants in this study continuously expressed their belief that visitation would have negative psychological consequences for their children. Many participants also give accounts of declining visitation in order to protect their children from what they viewed as a harmful environment.

Cookie, a 52-year-old mother of two, points to the need to protect her daughter from other incarcerated women and their visitors as a rationale for not wanting her daughter to visit. She states, "They just had a bunch of women and their friends, husbands, mothers and they would always be in there, cussing and carrying on and I didn't want that around, I didn't want her to be around that." For Cookie, her self-sacrificing behavior around visitations also resulted from her attempting to prevent her daughter from being incarcerated as an adult. When further quizzed about why her daughter was not allowed to visit her while she was incarcerated, Cookie explains:

Cookie: I didn't never, uh uh, no, because I knew she was gonna cry and so I just decided not to let her come.

Interviewer: Okay.

Cookie: When I was doing my time.

Interviewer: Was your biggest concern about her coming that she would cry, or did you have other concerns in addition to that?

Cookie: Well, I had other concerns and stuff about her seeing me in a place like that. And—

Interviewer: A place like what?

Cookie: Prison. And I don't know.

Interviewer: What did you think could potentially result from her seeing you in prison?

Cookie: Maybe she could, would follow in my footsteps, which I'm glad she hasn't.

While it is possible that mothers may have been resistant to their children visiting, their accounts of their desires to have contact with their children suggest otherwise. For many participants, they suggested that making decisions in the best interest of their children trumped their personal desires. Latisha, a 40-year-old mother of one, describes the decision she made about having contact with her son while incarcerated. She states, "...he wanted to talk to me, but I didn't want... didn't um want

him to see me like that. So I didn't want them to bring, to bring him to see me like that... I wanted to see my son too, but I just didn't want him to see me like that in there." Like many other participants, Latisha's account makes it clear that she wanted to have in-person visits with her son, but she sacrificed her personal desires for what she believed would be in his best interest. Cookie espouses similar sentiments: "As her mom, I wanted to, you know, see her grow up a little bit and I never wanted them to bring her to see me locked up. I didn't like that, so I didn't see her. Only seen pictures. And it was devastating to me." Cookie and Latisha believed they were making maternal sacrifices that were best for their children despite how devastating the decision was for them.

For incarcerated women, caregivers can sometimes act as gatekeepers for access to their children (Tasca et al. 2016). Thus, it is possible that participants are actually being denied access to their children and not declining visitation. However, for some participants in this study, their accounts do not suggest that a lack of access was a primary reason for not having visits with their children. Many women actually describe being receptive to having other forms of contact with their children, and only declining visits. Monica explains, "We wrote. We talked on the phone. But never in person. Never visiting, no. My sister would come but I told her, I asked her not to bring them." Like other participants, Monica children's caregiver was willing and able to facilitate prison visitation, and it was ultimately Monica who rejected the idea. Similarly, Katrina's

grandmother continuously offered to bring her children for visitation, but she declined saying, "I told grandma don't bring them, don't let them see me like that."

Despite participants discussing the value of remaining in communication with their children through letters and phone calls, they resisted in-person contact because of the perceived negative consequences it would have on their children. Specifically, participants described their rejection of visitation as a way to protect their children from potential psychological harm. I should note that participants did not reject all forms of contact, and in fact when available most women remained in contact with their children via phone or mail. Additionally, participants were often in contact with their children's caregivers and tried to remain engaged in their children's lives through their caregivers.

For participants who initially wanted their children to visit them in prison but were denied access by caregivers, they currently express gratitude to those caregivers for preventing them from engaging in maternal behaviors that they now view as "selfish." Sharon explains that her initial frustration with her child's caregiver who denied her visitation subsided once she realized that visitation was not in her daughter's best interest. When asked about her feelings about the caregiver denying her visitation out of fear that it would "traumatize" her daughter, Sharon states:

It hurt my feelings because I was being very selfish. I wanted to see my child. I didn't care. You know, and I was like, I want to see my young'un, you know. But in the grand scheme of things, thinking back on it now, I agree with her. You

know, Lizzie seeing that whole scene, she don't need, she's been exposed to so much already in her life, she don't need that, too. So I'm kinda grateful she didn't bring her. However, I feel like it contributed to my and Lizzie's relationship being non-existent after the prison sentence.

Studies find that a lack of steady contact between incarcerated mothers and children reduced the salience of maternal identity and harmed mother-child relationships post-incarceration (Barnes and Stringer 2014; Brown and Bloom 2009). Despite the devastating consequences of not having her daughter visit or having any contact with her while incarcerated, Sharon still views her desire for contact as a selfish maternal act. Sharon has internalized the idea that good mothering requires the needs of children be put first and above the needs of mothers. For women like Sharon, their lack of contact with their children during incarceration often strains the mother-child relationship during reentry. Thus, their attempts at engaging in intensive mothering through self-sacrificial behaviors further complicates their ability to live up to dominant ideologies of mothering upon release. Essentially, by absorbing hegemonic ideas about what it means to be a good mother, incarcerated women's actions ultimately reproduce the dominant views of mothering that label them as "bad mothers" (Glenn 1994). Moreover, even if some participants were actually denied access to their children despite wanting visitation, and later claimed visitation was not in their children's best interest,

their accounts still suggest an awareness of societal expectations for good mothering, and their attempts to construct a narrative that aligns with those expectations.

3.6 Discussion

For the majority of women, the identity and role of a mother is a critical component of self-definition (Hays 1998). Thus, for incarcerated mothers, they must navigate their troubled social identities as “bad mothers.” Scholars have long explored how individuals act in response to socially constructed troubled identities, and many find that individuals engage in resistance to reconstruct positive identities (Geiger and Fischer 2003; Granja et al. 2015). More recently, studies have examined how marginalized women negotiate their maternal identity under dominant ideologies of intensive mothering (Bemiller 2010; Johnston and Swanson 2006; Romagnoli and Wall 2012). This study adds to existing theoretical conceptualizations of maternal identity construction amongst marginalized mothers who experience numerous constraints on their ability to parent. It builds on past studies of maternal identity construction to examine the identity work performed by incarcerated mothers in their efforts to establish themselves as “good mothers.”

Research indicates that both individual and structural factors impact women’s maternal identities and experiences. For incarcerated mothers, their physical separation from their children prevents them from assuming a traditional maternal identity and role. The stigma of a criminal record also results in the loss of women’s most salient

identity as mothers, specifically their identity as “good mothers” (Aiello and McQueeney 2016). This raises a question of how incarcerated mothers construct normative maternal identities under the constraints of incarceration.

From retrospective interviews with 40 formerly incarcerated mothers, I find that incarcerated women engage in identity work both in terms of the accounts they provide and actions they take to mother. Incarcerated mothers’ identity work involves defensive othering where they define good mothering in contrast to other more stigmatized mothers. Participants also adopt make-shift methods of intensive mothering while incarcerated. Specifically, mothers choose caregivers who fit within the dominant definition of good mothers (i.e., heterosexual, nuclear families, financially stable) and attempt to remain involved in their children’s daily lives. Intensive mothering also advances the notion that good mothers are responsible for their children’s safety and success. Mothers are also expected to sacrifice by placing their children’s needs above their personal wants and desires. Thus, participants also perform self-sacrificial practices around mother-child visitation that align with expectations of intensive mothering.

Participants’ attempts at intensive mothering are met with great obstacles. First, mothering must occur within environments that ultimately undermine parenting efforts. Additionally, some of the parenting actions participants are able to engage in further perpetuate their labels as “bad mothers.” For instance, a lack of in-person contact between women and their children can hinder mother-child relationships during reentry

(Brown and Bloom 2009). Visitation also has consequences for custodial claims, and a lack of visitation may disadvantage mothers in their attempts of familial reunification, as courts are sometimes unfavorable to women who fail to maintain contact with their children while incarcerated (Kennedy 2012). This is especially concerning because most women plan to be reunited with their children following release (LaVigne et al. 2009). Despite these challenges, I find that women still attempt to create positive maternal identities and implement intensive mothering strategies.

4. Strategic Engagement: Formerly Incarcerated Women and the Labor Market

“So the system, it’s not set up to help you. It’s kinda set up to work against you. I just experienced a lot of rollbacks and because I’m intelligent, a little bit and because I’m educated a little bit, I’ve kinda found loopholes to go around them, you know. Versus try to go through them, I go around them.” – Theresa

4.1 Introduction

In recent years, a growing body of literature has examined the gendered aspects of incarceration and reentry (Belknap 1996; Opsal 2015; Richie 2001; Richmond 2017). These studies suggest that gender has a direct impact on various reentry outcomes, including employment (Arditti and Few 2006; Richie 2001). Specifically, finding employment is crucial because it is tied to material goods and resources, housing, economic mobility, meeting the conditions of parole/probation, and recidivism (Graffam et al. 2005; Gurusami 2017; Lipsitz 2012; Sampson and Laub 1995; Uggen 2000). Despite this, few studies explore the impact of incarceration on women’s employment outcomes (see Lalonde, Rosa, and Cho 2008; Richmond 2017; Tonkin et al. 2004), and even fewer studies account for racialized differences in women’s employability. Instead, scholars often treat formerly incarcerated women as a monolithic group. This treatment overlooks how race may act as a differentiating mechanism for formerly incarcerated women reentering the paid labor market.

Although they are not absent from research, we know very little about how criminal records impact Black women’s employability (Decker et al. 2014; Gurusami

2017, 2019; Morris et al. 2008). However, there are reasons to suspect that Black women will face unique employment obstacles during reentry. First, scholarship suggests that all women face substantial barriers to employment such as occupational segregation, the gender pay gap, limited social networks, and the cost of raising children (England et al. 1988; Levanon, England, and Allison 2009; Lutter 2015). Second, differential treatment by race continues to be a notable form of stratification in the U.S. labor market (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004). Third, the effect of racial discrimination in the labor market is consequential for individuals with a criminal record (Harris and Keller 2005; Pager 2003; Pager, Western, and Bonikowski 2009). Fourth, we know race and gender intersect in the labor market to produce disadvantages for women of color (Browne and Misra 2003). Thus, formerly incarcerated Black women must contend with gender-based discrimination, racial discrimination, and the mark of a criminal record.

Drawing from intersectional frameworks that explore how social categories such as race, class, and gender create independent and overlapping systems of disadvantage (Andersen and Collins 1992; Collins 1993; Crenshaw 1991), I examine the paradoxical employment outcomes of formerly incarcerated women. I argue that formerly incarcerated women utilize strategic engagement to reenter the paid labor market. Specifically, women employ the following strategies: 1) identifying employers with low barriers to entry; 2) activating social networks; 3) disclosure of criminal records; and 4) preemptive stigma management. I contend that racial variations exist in formerly

incarcerated women's use of strategic engagement, which ultimately influences their employment outcomes. The findings highlight the unique ways that race and gender impact women's experiences in the paid labor market.

4.2 Literature Review

4.2.1 Incarcerated Individuals and the Labor Market

Labor market engagement is a critical aspect of social advantage and disadvantage (Dean 2016). The benefits of post-release employment are not limited exclusively to material resources. Instead, jobs offer stability, daily structure, increases in social capital, and feelings of reentry success (Heidemann et al. 2016; Middlemass 2017; Petersilia 2003; Sampson and Laub 1995). One of the greatest challenges facing formerly incarcerated individuals is gaining stable employment (Petersilia 2003). Post-release employment challenges are: 1) individual limitations in human capital and skills, 2) labor market exclusion, and 3) labor market detachment (Sheely n.d.).

First, many individuals enter prison with lower levels of education and gaps in their work history (Harlow 2003), making finding post-release employment exceedingly difficult. When formerly incarcerated individuals are employed, they earn less than their counterparts who do not have criminal records (Western 2002). Furthermore, despite ever increasing state expenditures on corrections (The Sentencing Project 2018b), many states cut funding for the educational and vocational training of prisoners following the 2008 recession (Davis et al. 2014).

Second, formerly incarcerated persons face stigma in the labor market and must often overcome employers' unwillingness to hire individuals with a criminal record (Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2006; Pager 2003). Research suggests employers are reluctant to hire formerly incarcerated persons due to safety concerns, potential liability if an act of violence occurs, and beliefs about their lack of skills and long-term job commitments (Giguere and Dundes 2002; Harris and Keller 2005). Employer preferences are exacerbated by the ease with which they can access criminal records of job applicants via background checks and online records (Gurusami 2019; Jacobs and Crepet 2007; Lageson 2016; Uggen and Blahnik 2016). The proliferation of online records makes it increasingly difficult for those with criminal records to shed negative labels when returning to communities (Gurusami 2019; Uggen and Blahnik 2016). Moreover, employers who opt out of performing background checks often use other characteristics that may indicate a criminal history to exclude applicants (Holzer, Steven, and Stoll 2004). Many formerly incarcerated individuals are also prohibited by state laws and industry regulations from pursuing various occupations during reentry. In fact, there are over 27,000 state occupational licensing restrictions for individuals with a criminal record, with 19,000 of them being permanent disqualifications (Avery, Emsellem, and Hernandez 2017).

Finally, labor market detachment occurs when people leave the labor market in anticipation of or in response to limited job prospects (Sheely n.d.). Detachment can also occur when individuals attempt to avoid institutions they believe may heighten their

risk of criminal justice contact (Brayne 2014; Goffman 2009). Given limitations in human capital and skills, labor market exclusion, and labor market detachment, it is not surprising that 60 percent of formerly incarcerated individuals remain unemployed after release (Avery et al. 2017). Exacerbating these challenges in the labor market, many formerly incarcerated persons have the added burden of mandated post-release employment. These mandates require individuals to find jobs within a specific time frame, and failure to do so can lead to re-incarceration (Petersilia 2003). Zatz and colleagues (2016) find that about 9,000 individuals are re-incarcerated daily for employment mandate violations while on parole or probation.

While there are universal obstacles faced by formerly incarcerated individuals, some challenges are gendered and racialized. Men and women do not encounter identical barriers in the labor market, and Black and White women likewise face different obstacles. Although intersectional approaches have been used in research on domestic and sexual violence (Crenshaw 1991), employment discrimination (Browne and Misra 2003), and mass incarceration (Crenshaw 2013; Roberts 2012), few studies have used this framework to examine labor market reentry amongst formerly incarcerated women, specifically Black women (see Gurusami 2017).

4.2.2 Intersectionality and the Labor Market

Feminist theorists have warned against approaches that generalize about race based on the experiences of Black men and women based on the experiences of White

women (Collins 1986, 2000; Crenshaw 1991; King 1988). Such approaches obscure the distinct social position that Black women occupy in society (Hooks 2014) and ignore how Black women encounter and manage multiple forms of disadvantage. Studies that emphasize the labor market experiences of formerly incarcerated women rarely disentangle the racial differences amongst women and how this shapes reentry into the paid labor market (see Belknap 2014; Dodge and Pogrebin 2001; Opsal 2015; Scroggins and Malley 2010). Black women must gain and maintain employment in the face of gender-based barriers in the labor market and stereotypes of Black criminality (Andersen and Collins 1992; Gross and Hicks 2015; Gurusami 2018; Roberts 1993).

Black women enter prison already having faced a multitude of economic disadvantages. While most people living in poverty are women (Cawthorne 2008; Denavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2013), Black women are twice as likely as White women to live in poverty (Cawthorne 2008). Despite having the longest history of employment amongst women, Black women earn 61 cents for every dollar paid to White men, while White women earn 77 cents (National Partnership for Women & Families 2019). Thus, Black women's financial vulnerability is often exacerbated by their time in prison. Incarcerated women also have lower levels of education (The Sentencing Project 2007), and Black women in prisons are nearly twice as likely as White women to have never completed high school (Couloute and Kopf 2018).

For Black women who have the skills, education, and work history to obtain post-release employment, being the primary caregivers of minor children often serves as a barrier (Gurusami 2018; Mitchell and Davis 2019; Robison and Hughes Miller 2016). Approximately 70 percent of women in prison are mothers, and over 50 percent of these mothers report living with their minor children before being incarcerated (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). Black women make up 28% of the mothers in prisons (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). Moreover, Black women are more likely to head single-parent households, with 54 percent of Black minors living in single-mother households compared to 18 percent of White minors (U.S. Census Bureau 2018). Compared to White single-mother households, Black single-mother households also have a higher risk of being in poverty (Damaske, Bratter, and Frech 2017; McLanahan and Percheski 2008). Thus, for Black women, the cost of childcare can be a greater barrier to entering the labor market (Scroggins and Malley 2010). Besides childcare costs, Black women face unique reentry challenges related to mothering under state surveillance during reentry (Gurusami 2018; Jones and Seabrook 2017).

Gender is a critical component of the organization of labor markets. Formerly incarcerated women enter a labor market where they face occupational segregation, gender discrimination, and lower wages (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010; Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007; England and Browne 1992; Levanon et al. 2009). For instance, employers are more likely to hire formerly incarcerated individuals for more physically

demanding jobs (e.g., construction, manufacturing) than jobs in the service sector (e.g., health care, retail, food services) where women are heavily concentrated (Bumiller 2015). Additionally, many of the industries that formerly incarcerated people are disqualified from are in childcare, nursing, and education (Petersilia 2003), where women are also concentrated. The challenges of occupational segregation may be greater for Black women who, because of their economic vulnerability, often engage in criminal activity (i.e., theft, larceny, fraud) to offset their socioeconomic status (Bush-Baskette 1998; Richie 2001). Not only do these crimes lead to arrest and imprisonment, they also create unique reentry obstacles for Black women because they are more likely to be employed in the service sector. Specifically, 28 percent of Black women are employed in service sector jobs compared to 19 percent of White women (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018). Thus, Black women are more likely to be in industries where employers may be reluctant to hire individuals with criminal records and where licensing restrictions make them ineligible.

Women's structural positioning within jobs makes it more difficult to access and advance using their social networks (McDonald 2011; Petersen, Saporta, and Seidel 2000). In addition, low-wage workers withhold job referrals because they fear that the individual might be unreliable and jeopardize their own reputation with employers (Newman 2009; Smith 2005). Given that many formerly incarcerated Black women partake in the low-wage labor market, it is possible that individuals in their networks

deny them formal and informal referrals. Black women also return to poor and segregated communities, which further limits their employment opportunities and access to social networks that could improve their job prospects (Reisig et al. 2002).

Given these barriers, it is not surprising that Black women have worse employment outcomes than their counterparts (Avery et al. 2017). Morris and colleagues' (2008) audit study finds that formerly incarcerated Black women are especially vulnerable to racial and gender bias when seeking employment, with Black women receiving the fewest responses to their resume compared to any other group. Similarly, an audit study by Decker and colleagues (2014) finds that the employment chances of a White woman with a criminal record are 62 percent higher than that of a Black woman without a criminal record. These results echo Pager's (2003) findings on racial bias in the employment of formerly incarcerated men.

Besides structural barriers, Black women must contend with stereotypical controlling images that often result in their unemployment, underemployment, and labor market exploitation (Collins 1986). Black women are often portrayed as poor, lazy, drug-addicted, and prone to criminality (Collins 2000; Roberts 1993). These controlling images directly contradict hegemonic feminine archetypes of womanhood and motherhood (Mitchell and Davis 2019; Roberts 1993; Robison and Hughes Miller 2016), which can be consequential in the labor market. For example, one study found that working class Black women were viewed as unreliable because employers typified them

as single mothers who “are loyal to their children first and their jobs second” (Kennelly 1999:181). Employers also perceived Black women as more likely to be absent from their job (Kennelly 1999). While these stereotypes may contribute to unemployment, other stereotypes of Black women may exacerbate their labor market exploitation. Kennelly’s (1999) study found that some employers viewed Black women as desperate thus reliable employees. While this may seem beneficial, the perceived desperation may lead employers to exploit women by offering lower wages, fewer opportunities for promotion, and unreliable hours.

Scholarship suggests that failing to use an intersectional framework will overlook how race and gender impacts post-release employment. Moreover, research that does not account for how race and gender intersect will overlook how the experiences of women may vary by the different aspects of their social identity. Taken together, this raises questions about how formerly incarcerated women, specifically Black women, are navigating the labor market and engaging with employers.

4.2.3 Strategic Engagement

One method that formerly incarcerated women use to navigate the labor market is strategic engagement. Strategic engagement refers to the process through which “individuals, groups and communities can interact with, contribute to, draw from—and potentially reject—the formal and informal institutions” (Martin 2003:14). It highlights the process by which marginalized individuals or groups interact with various

institutions as a means of resistance and to achieve desired outcomes. Although research has explored the resistance strategies of marginalized groups (McAdam 1983), many of the studies focused on social movements and more organized forms of resistance such as strikes and boycotts (Ewick and Silbey 2003).

More recently, scholars have addressed everyday non-organized resistance and engagement by subordinate groups. For example, Stuart's (2011) study of homeless and low-income residents examined how skid row residents in Los Angeles use strategic engagement by filming interactions with police officers to counteract perceived officer misconduct and rigid policing efforts. Broeders and Engbersen's (2007) study explored the counterstrategies used by undocumented immigrants in Europe to avoid discovery and deportation. They illustrated how undocumented migrants relied on networks and institutions difficult for the state government to regulate to find employment, housing, and documents. For example, many immigrants changed or masked their personal identity and undocumented status by adopting fake identities, destroying their identification papers (i.e., passports), and concealing their undocumented status from state agents, formal organizations, and individuals in their social networks.

Although much of the scholarship on strategic engagement has focused on social movements, the law, and legal actors, I argue that we can use this framework to understand how other vulnerable groups (i.e., formerly incarcerated women) engage with institutions and legal actors. Similar to other groups that must navigate

discrimination, formerly incarcerated women use their knowledge of actors, policies, and procedures to attain employment. I contend that while incarceration shapes the employability of all women, race acts as a differentiating mechanism for how women experience the labor market and their use of different strategies.

Strategies used to navigate the labor market are determined by individuals' social status and identities, including race, gender, and criminal justice status (Gurusami 2017). Thus, Black women's position at the bottom of the race and gender hierarchy shapes the work they seek, the help they receive, and the strategies they utilize to engage with employers. While research examines barriers to employment during reentry (Pager 2003; Petersilia 2003, 2005; Visher, Debus-Sherrill, and Yahner 2011), there is a dearth of research on how Black women respond to barriers they face when reentering the labor market. Thus, this study addresses three research questions:

RQ1: Amongst women in the study, are there racial variations in employment outcomes?

RQ2: What strategies do women use to reenter the paid labor market?

RQ3: Amongst women in the study, are there racial variations in the use of strategies?

4.3 Data and Methods

To understand how formerly incarcerated women navigate the labor market, the present study draws on 40 in-depth interviews of Black and White women primarily in

North Carolina. In-depth interviews are methodologically appropriate when researchers are interested in exploring how individuals make meaning of life experiences (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2013). The interviews are semi-structured, meaning I used a detailed interview guide with questions and follow-up probes, but allowed the interview to follow the topical trajectory of the women, which sometimes deviated from the guide.

I identified participants in several ways. First, because system involvement amongst women is disproportionately distributed by race and socioeconomic status (Carson 2018; Greenfeld and Snell 1999), I used a targeted recruitment strategy. As a part of recruitment, I distributed flyers in low-income and predominantly minority communities in the Research Triangle area (i.e., Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill). I placed flyers in local businesses and social service and reentry organizations (e.g., Salvation Army, Goodwill). I also contacted reentry and non-profit organizations and provided them with flyers to distribute to clients. Finally, I used snowball sampling to identify additional women. I sent women who responded to the flyer a follow-up email to determine eligibility. To be eligible, women had to be: 1) previously incarcerated in jail or prison for a minimum of 2 months, 2) a parent at the time of incarceration, and 3) the primary caregiver of their child prior to incarceration.

All interviews took place between May 2018 and July 2019 and ranged in length from 55 minutes to 3.5 hours. A research assistant and I conducted all interviews, and women received \$40 USD as compensation for their participation. Interviews took place

at women's homes, local reentry organizations, public libraries, and coffee shops. All women were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity and potentially identifying information such as the names of their employers and children were changed or omitted. Interviews covered a range of topics including criminal justice involvement, employment history, and interactions with various institutions during reentry. I also asked women to complete a short demographic survey prior to the interview. I coded interview transcripts for emerging themes using NVivo software and developed coding schemes from themes. I analyzed the transcripts iteratively to allow the ongoing revision of emerging themes based on preliminary findings and theory (Small 2009). Finally, memos were used with existing research to refine codes and themes.

The demographic characteristics for Black and White women are reported separately (see Table 2). Women ranged in age from 23 to 62, with average ages of 41 and 35 for Black and White women, respectively. Sixty-five and 56 percent of Black and White women respectively have never been married, and both groups currently had about 3 children on average. Sixty-nine percent of Black women reported having a GED or high school equivalent compared to about 81 percent of White women. Approximately 6 percent of White women had an associate degree compared to about 9 percent of Black women, and about 13 percent of Black women had a bachelor's or advanced degree. Most women report extensive criminal histories involving multiple arrests, convictions, and jail/prison time. On average, Black women had about 10 arrests,

6 convictions, and spent about 21 months in jail/prison. White women had about 11 arrests, 7 convictions, and spent about 24 months in jail/prison. Some women could not give an accurate self-report of their criminal history because they have incurred many arrests, convictions, and short jail sentences, and instead provide estimates of their criminal justice contact. While women were not asked to disclose their criminal charge on the demographic survey, most Black and White women discussed being charged with drug- or property-related crimes during the interview. Finally, about 30 percent of Black women report being currently employed, compared to about 63 percent of White women. Generally, women in this sample fit the education, economic, and social profiles that we find with system-involved women.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics by Race

Sample Characteristics	Black (n = 23)	White (n = 16)
Mean Age	41	35
Marital Status (Single)	65%	56%
Mean Number of Children	3	2.6
Education		
Some HS	8.7%	12.5%
HS Diploma/GED	69.5%	81.3%
Associate	8.7%	6.2%
Bachelors/Advanced	13.1%	-
Mean Length of Sentence (months)	21	24
Currently Employed	30%	62.5%

Note: 1 participant not included in the analysis

4.4 Findings

Data gleaned from this study reveal that while incarceration shifts employability for all women, the current employment status of women obscures a critical component of post-incarceration employment. Specifically, findings suggest that race acts as a differentiating mechanism for women's labor market experiences and outcomes. While 74 percent of Black women report being employed prior to incarceration, only 30 percent are currently employed. The reverse occurs with White women where only 33 percent are employed prior to being incarcerated compared to the 60 percent that are currently employed. These findings are notable for several reasons. As mentioned earlier, challenges with employment during reentry are associated with three explanations: 1) individual limitations in human capital and skills, 2) labor market exclusion, and 3) labor market detachment.

First, Black and White women in this study have similar levels of education, and in fact all of the women in the study with a bachelor's or advanced degree are Black. In terms of work history, the findings suggest that Black women were actually at an advantage, as more of them reported being employed prior to being incarcerated. Second, most of the women in this study who are unemployed, report still searching for stable employment, thus labor market detachment is a less likely culprit of the results. Scholarship also suggests that formerly incarcerated women lack access to the types of

state and family financial support needed to detach from the labor market (Richie 2001; Visser, LaVigne, and Travis 2004). Moreover, declining public safety nets and the rise of neoliberalism have lessened underprivileged women's ability to rely on public welfare (Edin and Shaefer 2015), thus making complete detachment from the market less likely. This leaves labor market exclusion as the most plausible explanation for the differences in outcomes. This raises questions about why race acts as a differentiating mechanism for formerly incarcerated women.

I suggest that gendered and racialized labor markets play a role in how women engage with employers. Specifically, women use four key strategies when attempting to reenter the paid labor market: 1) identification of employers with low barriers to entry; 2) activation of social networks; 3) disclosure of criminal records; and 4) preemptive stigma management. While all women employ some variation of these strategies, race informs women's attempts at strategic engagement. I argue that while incarceration shifts employability for all women, race acts as a differentiating mechanism for women's access to—and implementation of—various strategies, thus shaping their level of success when using these strategies.

4.4.1 Identification of Employers with Low Barriers to Entry

For formerly incarcerated individuals, re-entering the paid labor market requires finding employers who do not hold strong preferences about hiring individuals with

criminal records. While individuals can rely on compiled online lists of employers willing to hire formerly incarcerated persons and job applications that do not require the disclosure of a criminal record, these tools do not account for discrepancies in employers' stated hiring preferences and their actual hiring practices (Pager and Quillian 2005). Thus, for many women, identifying employers with low barriers to entry requires moving beyond employers' stated neutral preferences to identify employers who benefit from hiring individuals with a criminal record. For women, this means seeking jobs in organizations aimed at reentry, rehabilitation, or recovery. In these work settings, women do not have to be concerned about employers performing background checks because they view their criminal history as an asset for the job. These types of social service jobs are typically dominated by women as they require care work which is relegated to women in occupationally segregated labor markets. Bridgette, a Black mental health and drug abuse counselor explains:

So they wanted people like me...with peer support, they usually work with people that are, have substance abuse issues or mental health issues...So you know...I was an asset to companies because if a client, they'd have a client that was just coming home from prison, I can direct them to programs that will help them.

Bridgette's personal experience with reentry meant that employers in the field view her as an asset for assisting other clients. Similarly, Tracy, a White recently released mother who served about three years in prison, describes attempting to find a job as a peer counselor. She states, "I have an appointment tomorrow at vocational rehab to do my orientation, I'm gonna get my peer support certificate and you know, that's a field kind of where they expect you to be a felon...the best kind of outlook I can take on is going into a field where they expect you to be a felon, going into like some kind of substance abuse career or being a counselor or something." Like Bridgette, Tracy believes her best employment prospects lie in industries/organizations where she can leverage her prior substance abuse and criminal justice history as an asset to employers.

Despite the potential benefits of identifying employers and organizations aimed at reentry, racial differences emerge in the barriers that prevent women from pursuing this form of employment. For Tonya, a 24-year-old Black mother of three, the number of resources needed to pursue employment in these organizations exceeded her current financial resources. She describes the financial barriers to becoming a peer support counselor stating:

I've thought about it, but I kinda need a vehicle so I can get around to them. I know how peer support stuff goes and I need certain things, like I'm required to have a driver's license and a vehicle to transport my clients, if need be.

As Tonya points out, entering this field requires a certain level of financial stability and resources. Despite Tracy being released one year ago, compared to Tonya's two years, Tracy has a vehicle making it easier for her to transition to peer support work. This makes finding employers with low barriers to entry a viable strategy for Tracy. While the feminization of poverty has consequences for both Tracy and Tonya, like many formerly incarcerated Black women, Tonya's greater economic vulnerability places her at a larger disadvantage. Thus, even when provided amenable employers, Black women's social and financial vulnerabilities creates barriers to reentering the paid labor market.

Black women also cite the emotional labor and low wages associated with these types of social service jobs as a reason for not pursuing this form of employment. Dawn, a Black woman explains:

That is another way to use felonists, as a nothing. Okay. Make you do all the work for little pay. That is a therapist, honey. But they name it peer support. Another thing they came up with. You're a therapist. If I'm gonna be doing all that, I wanta be getting paid therapist money... You are working with several clients through the day like a therapist, all day long. For little money.

While one benefit of entering social service fields is higher wages, the women able to receive higher wages typically have college or advanced degrees. Given the

educational background of many formerly incarcerated Black women, they are often relegated to entry-level positions in reentry and rehabilitation organizations, which means lower pay. Dawn correctly recognizes the devalued status of her labor within social service fields. Her concerns are like that of other Black women who worry about being emotionally and financially exploited in the paid labor market. Dawn's experience also provides an example of the types of emotionally demanding and morally redemptive jobs Black women are often forced to pursue to demonstrate their rehabilitation (Gurusami 2017).

4.4.2 Activation of Social Networks

Women and racial minorities are disadvantaged in using social networks in the labor market (see McDonald, Lin, and Ao 2009). Although the results from studies about the mechanisms behind these disadvantages are mixed, the findings support that both groups do not receive the same benefits as White men (Grugulis and Stoyanova 2012; McDonald 2011; Petersen et al. 2000). However, many of these studies do not disentangle the role of social networks at the intersection of gender and race. Furthermore, few studies explore the use of social networks in the labor market reentry of formerly incarcerated individuals, and to date, there are no known studies that examine the role of social networks on the employability of formerly incarcerated Black women.

In this section, I document how women use their social networks to find jobs during reentry and thereafter. I contend that racial differences emerge in the availability, selection, and activation of social networks. Namely, while all women draw on their social networks to access jobs, Black women are limited to their public social networks (e.g., social services, employment agencies, parole/probation officers), whereas White woman can draw on both public and private social networks (e.g., friends, family). Rhonda, a 26-year-old Black mother of two, illustrates the social network limitations faced by Black women in the following exchange:

Interviewer: Did you have any help from people around you in getting a job or finding a place to live?

Rhonda: Like it was programs like the temporary services. It was a temp service that helped you get jobs...Like the social services stuff had classes. The unemployment office, the county unemployment office. Temp services. They, it was like that kinda support.

Interviewer: Were there individuals you know that helped you or...

Rhonda: Oh, no.

Rhonda describes a sole reliance on actors in her public networks to assist her in her job search efforts. I argue that Rhonda's constrained network is a racialized mechanism of social network closure, and this form of social network closure may

partially explain why Rhonda is currently unemployed. Rhonda, who was previously employed as a production line worker and who is now unemployed, would benefit from support from those in her personal networks in her job search efforts. However, she does not have access to individuals in her private social network to provide such support. Rhonda's lack of access to private networks in the labor market is supported by Smith's (2005) work on deficiencies in the referral networks of low-income Blacks. Smith found that amongst the Black urban poor, there was a reluctance to provide job referrals and other types of job-finding assistance because of the distrust of job seekers. It is unclear if Rhonda simply lacked the social network for job referrals or if individuals in her existing social networks denied her job seeking assistance. While the mechanism is unclear, Rhonda and other participant's responses suggest that Black women are not just opting to rely on public networks but have limited access to private social networks that can be of assistance during the job search process.

Karen, a 31-year-old Black woman describes how she eventually found a job after learning that her employer did not perform background checks through the Work First program—a North Carolina program aimed at moving families away from welfare and into jobs. She explains “to this day, I’m still kinda struggling, trying to find a decent job cuz the only place that don’t do backgrounds is [omitted]...my employment counselor, she told me, they don’t do background, they don’t do drug tests, so they’d be one of the

jobs that you go to.” Karen explains that in the past, she applied for jobs by using fake social security numbers or omitting her criminal record. While she was hired using these strategies, she was often terminated once her employer conducted a background check. After experiencing a few firings using this strategy, she learned through a member of her public network that the best method to find long-term stable employment was to apply for jobs that would not require a background check. While her employment counselor directed her to a viable job, Karen earns less than \$10K annually and has no opportunity for advancement or promotion in her current position.

Similarly, Katrina a Black woman, use of her public network to find a job led her to another form of low-wage labor. Katrina describes how she also found a job through the Work First program.

Yeah, they got a Work First program...where instead of just sitting at home, drawing a check every month, you have to volunteer somewhere, and they will send you places to volunteer. It was very helpful. I volunteered at the adult daycare in [omitted] and they offered me a job a month later...so I started working for them, then the AFDC stops once you work full time and I was okay with it cuz I was making \$9 an hour.

Katrina’s experience in the labor market mirrors that of many formerly incarcerated Black women who are often caught at the intersection of feminized poverty,

the neoliberal state, and the criminal justice system (Bridges 2011; Roberts 1993). Poor Black women's reliance on public assistance places them in a position where they are confronted by narratives which present them as morally undeserving "welfare queens" (Bach 2014; Garcia-Hallett 2019). Thus, for women like Karen and Katrina, labor market reentry means additional entanglement with punitive and surveilling institutions such as the welfare system. Katrina's use of her public network also puts her in a position where she can no longer receive welfare benefits despite her low-paying job, thus cementing her socioeconomic position.

While White women also have access to public networks, unlike Black women, they can also draw on their private networks when attempting to reenter the paid labor market. Tracy describes how she found a job as a housekeeper during reentry:

The housekeeping supervisor at [omitted] where I lived and one of my best friends was the general manager. That's how I got the job. I would've never got that job if she hadn't been the GM. So she like taught me. I could like run like one of those hotels with my eyes closed. She taught me a lot and so that really helped me. I could go over to any one of these hotels and work there.

Tracy's private network of friends not only provided her with a job, but with additional training on the job so she could both transfer to different locations and advance within the organization. Tracy notes that given her criminal record, she would

not have been able to get this job without a personal recommendation from her friend. Thus, giving her an advantage in the hiring process over other applicants and in how quickly she found a job post release.

Shelly, a married 29-year-old White mother of three, similarly used her private networks to find a job. She explains, “I had a lot of friends who worked there or people that were in prison that were like, yeah, [omitted] will hire you and it’s good money. So I did and they hired me, and it was good money.” Tracy and Shelly’s experiences do not suggest that they lack access to public networks, but that besides their public social networks, they can also draw from their private networks.

Scholarship suggests that all women are disadvantaged by network closure (Christopherson 2009; Grugulis and Stoyanova 2012); however, the findings from this study suggest that for formerly incarcerated women, race uniquely shapes the social networks they can access. Specifically, Black women are limited to actors in their public networks, while White women are able to access both public and private networks. This reliance on public networks reduces the number of jobs Black women know of and can apply to, which ultimately reduces their chances of employment.

4.4.3 Disclosure of Criminal Records

Formerly incarcerated women use a variety of disclosure and non-disclosure strategies in the labor market. For instance, women in the study discuss using fake social

security numbers on job applications to ensure that their background checks do not produce a criminal record; the selective disclosure of elements of their criminal records; and the complete non-disclosure of criminal records. Like other techniques, there are racial differences concerning the application of disclosure strategies. These differences often emerge based on perceptions of employers. I found that Black women often opted to not apply to jobs based on their beliefs that they would not be hired because of their criminal record, whereas White women were willing to risk applying and omitting their criminal records, even if it meant they would be ineligible or terminated once the employer performed a background check. Black women were also more willing to disclose their criminal record on their job application, despite research which suggests that employers hold strong preferences for hiring individuals without criminal records (Giguere and Dundes 2002; Pager and Quillian 2005) and even when they believed disclosing would negatively impact their chances of being hired.

The following exchange illustrates how Cookie, a 52-year-old Black woman who is unemployed, rationalizes her decision to be forthcoming about her criminal record on job applications. She explains:

Cookie: People lie on their applications, sometimes they do. They don't put down that they been to jail or convicted of a crime or whatever.

Interviewer: So tell me why you opted not to do that?

Cookie: Cuz I needed a job and I mean,

Interviewer: Wouldn't it be easier to get the job if you...

Cookie: Told a lie?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Cookie: They're still gonna do a background check.

Cookie's willingness to disclose her criminal record stems from her belief that all employers inevitably perform background checks. Thus, despite the limitations that full disclosure places on her job search, she continues to be forthcoming about her criminal record. This is in direct contrast to Sharon, a White divorced mother of two who does not disclose her criminal record on applications. While she has been fired from previous jobs for not disclosing her criminal record, she continues to do so because she perceives that some employers will not follow through with a background check. She explains how she got her current job:

Sharon: I ended up applying at [omitted] and becoming a server on third shift.

Interviewer: And did they ask you about your criminal record? Or did you tell them?

Sharon: They asked, you ever been convicted of a felony. I said no... I lied, and they didn't check it and so, I mean I've lied before, on job applications and I got fired when they checked the criminal issue and it came back. So yeah.

Interviewer: But for this job...they never checked?

Sharon: Uh uh.

In Sharon's estimation, it is possible that once hired, employers will not always follow up with a background check. Her judgement seems to be paying off, as Sharon was able to transition from her job as a server and is now housekeeper. This difference in perception and disclosure strategy is important because it notes how race often underscores beliefs, experiences, and ultimately outcomes. While Cookie's worry of employers performing background checks persuades her to disclose her record, her disclosure most likely serves as a deterrent to being hired. Whereas Sharon's non-disclosure places her at an advantage when employers do not perform background checks. Given the possibility that employers may not follow up with a background check or that a background check may only reveal convictions within a specific time frame, it is not surprising that some women use a strategy of non-disclosure, as it increases the number of jobs women can apply for. Moreover, studies suggest that formerly incarcerated White individuals may be less willing to disclose their criminal record out of fear it would impact their racial advantage, whereas Blacks view their race as a stigmatized social identity (see Gunn, Sacks, and Jemal 2018).

However, the issue is what women feel like they can disclose their record, and how do employers determine what job applicants they perform background checks on?

While research suggests employers are more likely to racially discriminate on Blacks when they cannot perform background checks (Doleac and Hansen 2016), we don't know much about the role of race when determining whether or not to perform a background check. Moreover, this scholarship does not examine how gender affects this form of racial discrimination. This raises questions about what strategies women may employ when non-disclosure is not an option.

4.4.4 Preemptive Stigma Management

Although many jobs legally disqualify individuals with a criminal record, stigma often acts as an informal barrier (Pager 2007). Preemptive stigma management is a tool used by women to overcome the stigma associated with violating gender norms related to criminality. Women manage employer biases and their own stigmatized status (Dodge and Pogrebin 2001; Opsal 2012) by providing additional information about their experiences beyond their criminal records and by using in-person interviews to manage employers' potential stigma. This strategy is supported by studies that find that formerly incarcerated individuals are viewed as more redeemable when their crime are seen as a product of their circumstances (Maruna and King 2009). Women learn this strategy from experience and through various social service and reentry organizations. Tonya learned to preempt employer's stigma by providing detailed information about her criminal record through a *letter of explanation*. She discusses being aware that

potential employers were not interested in hiring individuals with criminal records and using her letter to go beyond the traditional explanation of one's criminal history. Tonya explains:

It's basically a cover letter for your criminal record. Like you have a separate cover letter for a resume... I put in there how I'm a victim of physical child abuse and I'm a victim of domestic violence. I put in there explaining my charges, how I got them, to the reasons why I got them, you know, defending myself and my children, making sure that we were safe, things of that nature.... regardless of anything I have to do... I always have that letter of explanation cuz that's what backs me up.

Rather than have potential employers find out through a background check that she was convicted of assault and domestic violence, Tonya uses her letter to provide a life history of abuse and trauma to give greater context to the actions leading to her conviction. She first implemented this strategy following advice provided in an employment readiness program, which suggested that employers are more sympathetic to women who were victims of domestic abuse. Considering that research suggests formerly incarcerated women who commit violent crimes feel stigmatized by potential employers (Morris et al. 2008), Tonya's approach is certainly a stigma-reducing strategy. This is a strategy which may not be available to formerly incarcerated men

given the controlling images of Black men which suggests they are perpetrators of violence (see Harvey Wingfield 2007). Moreover, the controlling images of Black men as more violent also suggest this may be a more effective form of stigma management when used by Black women.

While Tonya writes a letter to explain her domestic violence conviction, women may also provide verbal accounts of their life histories and criminal convictions to reduce stigma and increase their chances of being hired. For instance, women describe not initially disclosing or being vague about their criminal background on their job applications and using the in-person interview to provide the employer with more details about their criminal history. Vicki, a 43-year-old Black woman, explains why she finds this strategy beneficial:

I mean, cuz sometimes, I think when you put it down on an application, they just look at that, we ain't gonna call her. She did this. We're gonna step away from that.... Because I think when you just put it down, they judge you about what you put down, but then when you get to meet the person, [they think] that's not a bad person. She just made some mistakes, stuff like that.

Similarly, Marina, a Black woman explains omitting details about her criminal record from her job applications and waiting until the in-person interview to discuss it. She states:

I just put down, I put down the problem and then I write in, can explain in person or something...I have a real good personality and so I try to charm them.

It's like my [bachelors] degree and everything else, I try to, you know, promote myself in other ways, that way it won't be a part of the question you know.

Women like Vicki and Marina believe their employment opportunities will improve if they can get beyond the first barrier of listing a criminal conviction on their job application and provide employers with a more holistic narrative. Women consistently distinguish who they are as individuals and who their criminal records make them out to be "on paper." They emphasize how job applications often cement the stigma associated with having a criminal record and the need for in-person communication to overcome their stigmatized identities. Essentially, they attempt to circumvent the written application and manage employers' stigma about their criminal history via in-person communication.

This strategy was a tool more often used by Black women than White women. Despite being highly used by Black women, there are reasons why preemptive stigma management may not be as effective for Black women as it is for White women. While Black women may benefit from employers stereotypes about Black men and violence, it is possible that employers may also be less sympathetic to Black women with a history of violence, as it confirms narratives and controlling images about Black women as

angry and overly aggressive (Collins 2000; Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, and Harrison 2008). Additionally, Black women whose substance abuse issues led to their criminal justice involvement may not have access to similar redemptive narratives around drug use as White women (Tiger 2017). Historically, Black women who struggled with addiction were depicted as “crack addicts” who were unfit for motherhood and in need of punitive state intervention (Roberts 2012). While the opioid epidemic in working- and middle-class White communities has assisted in the reframing of substance abuse as a public health issue (Graham 2010; Seelye 2015), it is unclear how and if this has altered current perceptions of Black women who struggle with substance abuse.

Furthermore, while preemptive stigma management may be an individually effective strategy, research suggests that this strategy may do little to reduce general employer bias against hiring formerly incarcerated Black women. Pager and Karafin’s (2009) study on racial discrimination in the labor market finds that employers’ experiences with individual workers has little influence on their views of the larger group. Instead, they view individual employees who do not conform to stereotypes as the exception to the rule. Given the history of stereotypes about Black criminality and the racialization of crime (Mancini et al. 2015; Welch 2007), preemptive stigma management may not be as effective when used by Black women, and even if effective,

it may do little to shift employers' views of formerly incarcerated Black women as a larger group.

4.5 Discussion

Scholarship has outlined how incarceration functions to exacerbate disadvantages in the labor market beyond the traditional limitations resulting from less educational attainment and limited work histories (Pager et al. 2009). Drawing on 40 in-depth interviews with formerly incarcerated women, this article examines strategic engagement in the labor market and how race may act as a differentiating mechanism for formerly incarcerated women's labor experiences and outcomes. The analysis reveals that women use specific strategies with potential employers to accomplish desired goals. The strategies are: 1) identification of employers with low barriers to entry; 2) activation of social networks; 3) disclosure of criminal records; and 4) preemptive stigma management. Additionally, racial variations exist in formerly incarcerated women's use of strategies.

Given the sizeable population of incarcerated individuals, prisoner reentry and reintegration are increasingly important social challenges. However, contemporary policymakers primarily highlight criminal justice reform as a means of reducing the numbers of incarcerated people (Drug Policy Alliance n.d.). These discussions overlook the large numbers of formerly incarcerated individuals returning from prison to society.

Scholarship on mass incarceration and reintegration has also prioritized the experiences of men, particularly Black men, and failed to address the gendered aspects of mass incarceration (Ocen 2013). Additionally, studies that prioritize the experiences of women focus on White women or flatten the experiences of all women. Thus, these studies employ a single-axis framework that does not explore the racialized and gendered aspects of incarceration and reintegration, and largely overlooks the experiences of Black women.

For Black women, their race and gender creates cumulative disadvantages in incarceration and reentry that are related to but different from that of men. The significant income and wealth disparities faced by Black women prior to incarceration is further complicated by their time in prison, as it removes their tools for economic/financial survival during reentry. Thus, to the extent that Black women face multiple disadvantages during reentry, there is a greater likelihood that they will fall further into poor socioeconomic conditions and remain marginalized. Moreover, because of women's social position in the family, these disadvantages are more likely to be distributed to Black children, families, and communities.

As the rate of incarceration increases for women, variation in their strategic engagement provides valuable theoretical information about the literature on reentry and the labor market. The strategies used by formerly incarcerated women also offer

insights into the barriers to reentry. Specifically, women must contend with difficulties entering a gendered and racialized labor market compounded by their criminal record. Many of the difficulties women face are rooted in their stigmatized identities; thus, besides providing a pathway to employment by managing employer stigma, women's strategies also provide a general stigma management technique. While this article does not capture the labor market experience of every woman in the study or the experiences of all formerly incarcerated women, it offers valuable constructs and themes that emerge from women's accounts. Moreover, exploring women's attempts to reenter the labor market adds new dimensions to scholarship, policy discussions, and public discourse.

4.5.1 Future Research and Limitations

It is important to note that this study has several limitations. Interviews generate detailed first-person accounts of participants' reentry experiences, but unlike ethnographic observations, they do not directly observe women's experiences with employers. Additionally, I cannot statistically generalize findings from this study because of the small non-random sample, however, this study does allow empirical generalizations and theoretical construction about the strategies formerly incarcerated women use to reenter the paid labor market. Because of the study's recruitment strategy, the sample primarily comprises low-income minority women who are not college graduates. Although the sample reflects the female correctional population (see Glaze

and Maruschak 2008), it is likely that women's incomes and education levels affect their labor market strategies and outcomes. Perhaps socioeconomic status and education levels might also shape who is more likely to use and benefit from certain strategies. For instance, more educated Black women may be more adept at using stigma management with employers than less educated Black Women, and they also receive different responses from employers when using this strategy. Thus, future research should explore the strategies implemented by more educated women of higher socioeconomic status.

The recruitment strategy also yielded a wide range of time since women were released. While there is a great deal of variation in the time since women's last jail/prison sentence of 2 or more months, 50 percent of women were released within the last 3 years, 60 percent within the last 5 years, and nearly 83 percent within the last 10 years. However, this range of time provided the opportunity to describe the variety of experiences and strategies used by women across all stages of reintegration. Moreover, many women faced other obstacles (i.e., substance abuse, mental health problems) that may have impeded their job search efforts, limited their strategies, and affected the outcomes, making it difficult to disentangle the effects of a criminal record from other sociopsychological challenges. Despite this, the findings offer nuanced insights that raise questions about compounding reentry obstacles for women.

Finally, future research should explore how employers and institutions respond to the strategies used by women. Theories of power and resistance suggest a cyclical process in which the adaption and resistance to subjugation by marginalized groups is met with counteracting policies and practices of resistance by dominant groups (Stuart, Armenta, and Osborne 2015). Therefore, as formerly incarcerated women adopt practices to circumvent potential discrimination, dominant-group actors will develop new policies and practices. Future studies should also explore the strategies women use to engage with other relevant institutions (e.g., social services, welfare, medical establishments). Finally, scholars should draw on large-scale quantitative data to explore how the intersection of race and gender affects formerly incarcerated women's experiences and outcomes in the paid labor market.

5. Chapter 5: Conclusion

While men account for 93 percent of the U.S. prison population, women have seen an increase of over 700 percent in incarceration rates since the 1980s. Despite this, most sociological and criminological research examines the incarceration and reentry experiences and consequences of men. Additionally, existing research on system-involved women rarely disentangles the role of race in women's criminal justice involvement. Thus, this dissertation uses an intersectional approach to explore how formerly incarcerated women navigate various institutions throughout the life course.

In Chapter 2, I use a single case to highlight women's experiences with victimization and entrapment and institutional responses to the survival strategies. I also explore the role of race and gender in institutional responses. I argue that while many incarcerated women attempt to resist both childhood and adulthood victimization and entrapment, their strategies of resistance are criminalized leaving them further marginalized. Moreover, institutional responses are both gendered and racialized, which further diminishes an already vulnerable population. Finally, I suggest that the emphasis on women's individual experiences in the pathways perspective obscures the critical role of institutions in shaping women's pathways to prison.

In Chapter 3, I use retrospective accounts of formerly incarcerated women to explore how mothers define and construct their maternal identities while imprisoned. I

examine how beliefs about motherhood and mothering behaviors align with or depart from the dominant ideology of intensive mothering. I find that incarcerated mothers attempt to escape negative evaluations of their maternal identity by engaging in defensive othering where they redefine “good” mothering in contrast to other more stigmatized incarcerated mothers (i.e., “bad” mothers). I also find that in response to their maternal identity being challenged, many mothers in the study adopt aspects of the intensive mothering ideology available to them while incarcerated. Specifically, mothers select other women who fit the dominant narrative of good mothers (i.e., heterosexual, nuclear families, financially stable) to act as substitute caregivers for their children. Additionally, mothers attempt to engage in “good” mothering despite their physical and financial constraints. Finally, I argue that mothers engage in self-sacrificial practices around mother-child visitation that align with the sacrificial behavioral expectations of intensive mothering.

In Chapter 4, I use an intersectional framework to explore how social categories such as race, class, and gender create independent and overlapping systems of disadvantage for marginalized women (Andersen and Collins 1992; Collins 1993; Crenshaw 1991). I argue that formerly incarcerated women utilize strategic engagement to reenter the labor market by countering obstacles they experience. Specifically, women employ the following strategies: 1) identifying employers with low barriers to entry; 2)

activating social networks; 3) disclosure or non-disclosure of their criminal records; and 4) preemptive stigma management. I suggest that racial variations exist in formerly incarcerated women's use of strategic engagement, which ultimately influences their employment outcomes. The findings highlight the unique ways that race and gender converge to influence women's experiences in the paid labor market.

Appendix A

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Education		Pseudonym	Age	Race	Education
Brenda	51	W	Associate		Karla	41	B	Some College
Latisha	40	B	Associate		Marina	38	B	Bachelor's
Linda	31	W	HS Grad/GED		Selena	44	B	Some HS
Felicia	37	B	Some College		Katrina	43	B	Some College
Dawn	45	B	HS Grad/GED		Sabrina	34	W	Some HS
Lashawn	50	B	Some College		Kim	23	W	HS Grad/GED
Inez	54	B	Associate		Latoya	62	B	Masters
Alicia	51	W	HS Grad/GED		Tina	28	W	HS Grad/GED
Theresa	47	B	Some College		Shelly	29	W	Some College
Monica	47	B	HS Grad/GED		Bridgette	54	B	Bachelor's
Sharon	34	W	Some College		Kathy	31	Native	Associate
Nikki	33	W	HS Grad/GED		Rashida	35	B	HS Grad/GED
Lisa	34	B	HS Grad/GED		Kelly	26	W /H	HS Grad/GED
Veronica	28	B	HS Grad/GED		Nicole	42	W	Some College
Karen	31	B	Some College		Angel	32	W	Some College
Vicki	43	B	Some College		Juanita	39	B	HS Grad/GED
Cookie	52	B	Some College		Stacy	27	W	Less 8th grade
Tonya	24	B	Some HS		Tracy	32	W	Some College
Diane	42	W	Some College		Rhonda	26	B	HS Grad/GED
Laureen	37	B	Some College		Donna	37	W	Some College

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Introduction

From the previous conversation or materials I shared with you via email, you know that I am interested in understanding women's experiences with incarceration. Before we get started, is there anything you would like to ask me about the project? Or would you like me to clarify anything we've already discussed?

Family Background

I thought we could start by talking about things more generally so I can better understand who you are and where you're coming from, and then we can move on from there.

1. Tell me about what your family was like growing up.
 - a. How would you describe your relationship with your father? Mother?
 - b. Do you have any siblings? What was your relationship like with them?
2. Can you tell me about your neighborhood during middle/high school?
3. How would describe the type of student you were?
4. Did you have any family members who were in jail/prison? Who? How old were you?

Incarceration

Next, I would like to ask you some questions about your prior involvement with the criminal justice system.

1. When was the first time you were arrested and can you describe what was happening in your life at that point?
 - a. During that time, what was your relationship like with your family?

Relationship with Children

Next, I would like to ask you some questions about your relationship with your child(ren).

1. When did you have your first child? What was going on in your life at the point?
 - a. Where did you live? Romantic partners? Education?
2. How old were your children at the time you were incarcerated? What was going on in your life at that point in time?
3. Who were your children living with?
4. How would you describe your relationship with your child(ren) prior to being incarcerated?

Caregivers

Next, I would like to ask you a few questions about your child's primary caregiver while you were in prison. For these questions, I would like you to refer to your child's caregiver as "caregiver" and NOT by their name.

1. Was there a plan in place in case you went to jail/prison about what would happen to your child(ren)?
2. At that time, who would have been the ideal caregiver(s) for your children?
 - a. What makes this person the ideal caregiver?
3. Did the ideal caregiver end up taking your children?
 - a. If no, can you tell me why?
4. Who was the actual caregiver?
 - a. What was their relation to you and your child(ren)?
 - b. How did you make that decision?
 - c. Did you child(ren) have any input in the decision?
5. Were there any legal changes made to custody as a result of your incarceration?
 - a. If yes, can you tell me about those changes?

SKIP THESE QUESTIONS IF CHILD PLACED IN CPS

6. How would you describe the relationship between you and your child(ren)'s caregiver *prior* to your incarceration?
7. How would you describe the relationship between you and your child(ren)'s primary caregiver *during* your incarceration?
8. What types of communication did you have with their caregiver while incarcerated?

SKIP QUESTIONS IF NOT IN COMMUNICATION WITH CAREGIVER

9. How did you communicate with them? What did you talk with them about?
 - a. If no communication, can you explain why and how you felt about the lack of communication?
10. How did you make general decisions about your child(ren) with their primary caregiver?
11. Tell me about a time when you and the caregiver worked together effectively to parent your child(ren)?
12. Tell me about a time when you had a disagreement with your child(ren)'s caregiver about your child(ren) while incarcerated? How did you and the caregiver decide what to do?

Contact and Visitation

Next, I would like to ask you questions about contact with your children while you were in jail/prison.

1. Did you want your child(ren) to visit you? Tell me why or why not.

2. What effect did the relationship you have with your child's caregiver have on contact and visitation?
3. How did the distance from your child(ren)'s caregivers' place of residence to the jail/prison where you were incarcerated impact visits?
4. Did your child(ren) ever visit you in jail/prison?

SKIP QUESTIONS IF NOT IN CONTACT WITH CHILDREN

- a. If yes, how often did the visits occur? How did your child(ren) get to the jail/prison?
- b. How did your children respond to the visit?
5. What other forms of communication did you have with your child(ren)? Letters, emails, phone calls?
 - a. For each: how often did you communicate with your child(ren) this way? What types of things did you discuss with your child(ren)?
6. What effect did the relationship you have with your child's caregiver have on other forms of contact (letters, emails, phone calls) with your child(ren)?
7. Were there times when you weren't in communication with your child(ren)? Why?
 - a. Were you able to resolve this? How was it resolved?

Parenting in Prison

Next, I would like to ask you some additional questions about your relationship with your child(ren) and ideas about parenting while you were in jail/prison.

1. What worries did you have about your child(ren) while you were in prison?

(SKIP QUESTIONS IF MOTHER NOT IN CONTACT WITH CHILDREN)

2. How did your relationship with your child(ren) change as a result of going to prison?
3. Were there any rules that prevented you from being the type of mother you wanted to be? How did you deal with these rules?
4. Did you hear about any academic or behavioral changes in your child(ren) while incarcerated? How did you hear about it? How did you address the changes with your child(ren)? With their caregiver?

Relationships and Support

Next, I would like to ask you some questions about other people in your network, any support you received while in jail/prison, and the access you had to different resources.

1. What was the relationship with your child(ren)'s father prior to being incarcerated?

2. How did your relationship with your child(ren) father(s) change while you were in jail/prison?
3. What was your relationship with your family/relatives prior to being incarcerated? Did these relationships change while you were in prison? If so, how?
4. What was your relationship with your friends prior to being incarcerated? Did these relationships change while you were in prison? If so, how?
5. Can you tell me about a time when someone in your network who provided you with support while you were in jail/prison? What kind of support did they provide?

Release and Reentry

Next, I would like to ask you some questions about what happened with your children when you were first released.

1. How were you prepared for release and reentry?
2. Did you have any fears or concerns about reentry? Did you have any hopes about coming back? If so, how did they play out?
3. Did you have any fears about going back to jail/prison? Tell me about that...
4. Generally, what was life like when you were first released?
 - a. Where did you live? Who did your children live with?
5. What kind of problems did you encounter? Tell me the sources of these problems?
6. Tell me about your relationship with your parole/probation officer.
 - a. Have you found him/her to be helpful? Explain.
7. Tell me about reintegrating back into your family and community. What were some of your experiences?
 - a. Who in your network was the most helpful to you during this time?
How?
8. Has there ever been a time when someone in your network threatened to call law enforcement, your parole/probation officer, or social services on you? If yes, tell me about that.
9. Did you contact any support programs that you relied on during this time? How did you become involved with these programs?
 - a. What did you gain from the program? What type of support/resources do you get from being in this program? Did any important changes happen as a result of being in the program (e.g., housing, employment, help with substance abuse)?
10. What type of support you have liked to get, but did not?

11. Were there things you had to reestablish after release? Custody? Employment? Bank accounts? Public assistance (e.g., welfare, food stamps)? Medical care?
 - a. If yes, why was it important to reestablish these things?
 - b. If yes, **walk me through how you attempted to reestablish each one.**
12. Did you receive any help from people around you with a) getting a job? b) finding a place to live? etc.
 - a. Did you trust anyone to provide you with work referrals? Did anyone provide you with work referrals?
13. Did you consider extending your education in any way? Did you attempt to reenroll in school? If so, was your attempt successful? If not, can you tell me why?
14. What if anything do you tell people about your time in jail/prison? How do you decide who to tell?
15. What types of things you tell people about your criminal record? How did you decide what information you would share and with whom?
16. Has your criminal record ever prevented you from finding: a) housing, b) a job, c) receiving public assistance, d) going to the doctor/hospital, e) extending your education,
 - a. Tell me about that time? How were you able to work through it?

Parenting Post Release

1. Did you have any expectations about what would happen with your child(ren) when you got out of jail/prison?
 - a. How did your expectations match up with the reality of what actually happened with your child(ren) after your release?
2. What did your child(ren)'s caregivers think your role should be?
3. Did you have to convince the caregiver to allow you to have access to and/or custody of your child? If so, explain how you did this or are trying to do this.
4. Were there any barriers that kept you from your child(ren)?
5. Were you involved in your child(ren)s schooling (e.g., visits, volunteering, chaperoning, communication with teachers or admin)? If so, how? If not, why?

Life Today

Next, I would like to ask you some questions about your life today.

1. How do you define being successful following release from jail/prison?
2. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
3. Is there anything else you think I should know about this topic? Or something you think I should've asked about?

4. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Wrap Up

Now that you are familiar with what this process was like, do you know anyone who might be interested in participating? If so, feel free to pass along my contact information. That concludes our interview for today. Thank you so much for your time.

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Biography

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Zimife has been the recipient of the following awards: the Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship (2017-2020), the Kenan Institute for Ethics Graduate Fellowship (2018), the Brown-Nagin Graduate Fellowship (2018), the Aleane Webb Dissertation Research Fellowship (2018), the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues Grant-in-Aid (2018), and the Education and Human Development Scholars Program Fellowship (2016). She will receive her Ph.D. in May 2020 and begin work as a Presidential Diversity Postdoctoral fellow at Brown University in the fall.