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"I'm Doing Time on the Outside" -A Study of the Effects of Parental Incarceration on the Life Outcomes of Adolescent Children in the City of Hartford

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“I’m Doing Time on the Outside”

A Study of the Effects of Parental Incarceration on the Life Outcomes of Adolescent Children in
the City of Hartford

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Author Note:

This paper was submitted as the culmination of a two semester honors senior thesis project to partially fulfill the degree requirements of the Urban Studies major at Trinity College. The project was graciously overseen by Trinity College Paul E. Raether Distinguished Professor of Urban International Studies, Garth A. Myers. Additional insight and guidance for the project was generously provided by Trinity College Paul E. Raether Distinguished Professor of Urban International Studies and Dean of the Center for Urban and Global Studies, Xiangming Chen.

Abstract

The mandatory sentencing criteria established via the implementation of the infamous War on Drugs has resulted in the mass incarceration of millions of nonviolent offenders in the United States, and crafted a national penal population that is distinctly the largest in the world. Blatantly disproportional and misrepresented in racial and socioeconomic configuration, America's correctional and criminal justice system has become overcrowded with individuals who overwhelmingly hail from at-risk urban communities of color. As a result, low-income urban communities across the country have been devastated by the continuous destruction and misconfiguring of fragile families that occurs when an individual, especially one who is a parent, is imprisoned. As a result of this destruction, millions of innocent children and adolescents across the country are confronting the heavy burden of criminal activity that they did not commit by bearing the shattering effects of the experience of parental incarceration throughout their childhood process. These negative consequences and effects, ample in number and profound in severity, ultimately configure immensely into an adolescent's prospective life chances and outcomes, and compound with a range of alternative risk factors experienced via childhood immersion in at-risk urban environments to destructively impact the future of the affected adolescent population of children with presently or formerly incarcerated parents.

Introduction

“When I returned to my cell, I laid on my bunk and thought about my son. I imagined what he looked like. I wondered which characteristics he had inherited from me and which ones he had inherited from his mother. Brenda was a beautiful young lady, and I thought I was a decent-looking brother, so I was pretty sure that our son would be a looker. As I thought about him, my heart began filling with an unbelievable joy. I knew I had to find a way to be a part of my son's life. I vowed to find a way to be a father, even though I was in prison (Senghor, 2013, p. 106).

Shaka Senghor was raised in a working middle-class east side Detroit neighborhood during the height of the 1980s crack epidemic. An honor roll student with an aptitude for natural leadership, Senghor dreamed of a career in medicine, but found himself entrenched in the culture of the hard streets following the dismantlement of his parent's marriage and destruction of his stable upbringing at the age of eleven. Traumatized by a childhood of physical abuse bestowed upon him by his mother, Senghor eventually ran away from home and resorted to the sale of drugs as a teenager, leading to his ultimate demise. In 1991, at the age of nineteen, he was sentenced to fifteen to forty years for a murder charge in the second degree to be served concurrently with a two-year sentence for felony firearm possession. At the time of his sentence, Senghor's girlfriend, Brenda, was pregnant with the couple's first child. Like millions of other men and women confined behind the walls of America's prison system, Senghor was now an incarcerated parent, leaving behind an infant child in a world that he would be predominantly absent from for the next nineteen years (Senghor, 2013).

Recent data findings formulated via careful statistical analysis by the Prison Policy Initiative, a non-profit and non-partisan organization that produces cutting edge research to expose the broader harm of mass criminalization, found that the American criminal justice system currently detains upwards of 2.3 million people in 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 942 juvenile correctional facilities, and 3,283 local jails across the United States (Wagner & Rabuy, 2016). The rate of incarceration in the United States has more than quadrupled in the past four decades following a period of general stability from the 1920s through the 1970s, crafting a national offender population that is now the largest penal population in the world (Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014). Today, twenty-five percent of the globe's prisoners are confined to correctional facilities in the United States despite the nation

accounting for only five percent of the world's total population, and the rate of incarceration in this country (one in every one hundred adults) is a boggling five to ten times higher than the rate of incarceration in developed countries of Western Europe and other major global democracies (Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014).

Connected to the nation's 2.3 million prisoners are approximately 2.4 million hidden victims that bear the heavy burden of a crime that they did not commit as the children of incarcerated parents (Smyth, 2012). In addition to the 2.4 million children whose parent is presently incarcerated, a study conducted by the Osborne Association found that there are approximately ten million additional children in the United States who have experienced the incarceration of at least one parent at some point during their childhood (The Osborne Association, 2013). Statistically, these numbers represent one in every twenty-eight of the nation's youth population having an incarcerated parent – a number that jumps remarkably from just one in every one hundred twenty-five children just over two decades ago (The Osborne Association, 2013).

The swift influx in the number of children affected by parental incarceration has been fueled considerably by the rapid growth of the nation's corrections population via harsh mandatory sentencing laws for nonviolent offenses. As a result of the implementation of mandatory prison sentences for nonviolent criminal acts involving drug possession and distribution, more children than ever before are being separated from a parent via the merciless razor wire of America's prisons. This separation interrupts the stability and continuation of the childrearing process, and generates negative consequences to a child's emotional, mental, physical, spiritual and social health and wellbeing.

The negative consequences associated with the health and wellbeing of a child with an incarcerated parent are often summarized qualitatively and quantitatively in research as adverse childhood experiences (The Osborne Association, 2013). As defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are “childhood experiences, both positive and negative, that have a tremendous impact on future violence victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity” (Felitti, et al., 1998). Through the careful calculation of adverse childhood experience scores, professionals can “assess retrospectively and prospectively the long-term impact of abuse and household dysfunction during childhood on the following outcomes in adults: disease risk factors and incidence, quality of life, health care utilization, and mortality” (Felitti, et al., 1998, p. 246).

Included amongst the diverse realm of adverse childhood experiences widely recognized by professionals is the occurrence of parental incarceration, which research has shown to be associated with a host of negative life course outcomes – one of which potentially includes their own eventual immersion in the justice system. According to research produced by professors at Central Connecticut State University in 2015, children with incarcerated parents are three times more likely than their peers to become justice-involved and an estimated 32.8% of all children with incarcerated parents will actually become justice-involved (Conway & Jones, 2015). These statistics were garnered by carefully scrutinizing and contesting pre-existing research in the field that concluded that “children with incarcerated parents are six times more likely than other children to be justice-involved, and that seven out of ten children with incarcerated parents will become justice-involved” (Conway & Jones, 2015, p. 5). These contrasting statistics display an existing controversy amongst researchers in estimating the increased likelihood that a child with

an incarcerated parent will become justice-involved, yet simultaneously acknowledges that a greater probability is indeed present.

Using the detailed scholarly analysis of qualitative interviews conducted with the adolescent children of several incarcerated parents residing in the greater Hartford community, this honors thesis project aims to assess the extent to which this probability exists in the sample population, and to gain an understanding of how a parent's imprisonment has affected the childhood process and life chance. The culmination of an in-depth undergraduate education in urban studies, the thesis project studies existing literature on mass incarceration in the United States and the impact experienced by the affected populations, and applies qualitative interviews as a method of accepting or challenging the conclusions of the presented research. Via this process, the completed thesis intends to gain an understanding of the effects that parental incarceration produces on adolescent children, and the influence it has on their impending life chances, specifically their own risk of justice involvement. Most importantly, the completed project recognizes the voices of adolescent youth in the city of Hartford who are bearing the heavy burden of a traumatic childhood that lacked the stability and support of strong familiar networks. This honors thesis is their poignant, unedited story – a recount of the voices that are too often unheard. This is the story of the city of Hartford's most vulnerable youth, ravaged by the realities of poverty, crime, and separation, who have fought through unfathomable traumas to get to where they are today. They are the children of incarcerated parents, and this is their story.

Part One – Literature Review

I. The History of Incarceration in the United States

To fully comprehend the enormity of the complex phenomenon of present-day mass incarceration in the United States, the historical origins of the nation's primary prison systems

must first be traced to the initial stance the nation took in addressing the sociological notion of crime and punishment. Harry Elmer Barnes, a decorated historian, published an article in 1921 titled the *“Historical Origin of the Prison System in America”*, which effectively examined the primal roots of incarceration in the United States. According to Barnes, “the prison, viewed as an institution for detaining men against their will, probably goes back as far as the time of the general practice of cannibalism, when future victims were held in stockades to be fattened or to await their turn in contributing to the chief course in the menu of their captors” (Barnes, 1921, p. 36). Barnes continues to argue that the prison was frequently referenced as a space to confine political and religious offenders throughout history, and alleges that “the prison system of today, which is the agency through which imprisonment is made the mode of punishment for the majority of crimes, is an innovation of relatively recent origin” (Barnes, 1921, p. 36).

Academics trace the relatively recent origin of the modern prison system to the penitentiary, which is defined as an “institution designed for offenders to meditate upon their crimes and, through penitence, achieve absolution and redemption” (Johnson, Dobrzanska, & Palla, 2014, p. 23). The Walnut Street Jail, erected in Philadelphia in the year 1790, is recognized as the first penitentiary in American history. This facility “carried out incarceration as punishment, implemented a rudimentary classification system, featured individual cells, and was intended to provide a place for offenders to do penance” (Johnson, Dobrzanska, & Palla, 2014, p. 24). According to Johnson, Dobrzanska, and Palla,

“In the most general sense, the penitentiary was meant to be a separate and pure moral universe dedicated to the reclamation of wayward men and women. It would isolate criminals from a corrupt and corrupting world, and it would reshape their characters through the imposition of a strict routine of solitude, work, and worship. Two distinct versions of this moral universe were offered, known respectively as the separate and congregate systems” (p. 24).

The separate system of correctional facilities, also referred to as the Philadelphia or Pennsylvania system due to its origins in the Walnut Street Jail, was a prison system in which inmates had separate cells and never interacted with other inmates or outsiders throughout the entirety of their prison sentence (Johnson, Dobrzanska, & Palla, 2014). This system constructed a regime-like institution of “solitary confinement and manual labor, where the inmates lived a simple monastic existence separate from one another as well as the outside world” (Johnson, Dobrzanska, & Palla, 2014, p. 24). Reminiscent of the distant, entrenched lifestyle of the Middle Age monks, prisoners serving time in a facility that exemplified the separate system of imprisonment were expected to undergo a fundamental conversion of personal character through extreme penance and the focusing of the mind on the simplistic aspects of nature and religion (Johnson, Dobrzanska, & Palla, 2014).

In contrast to the separate system, the congregate system, or Auburn system of correctional facilities, was a “prison system where inmates slept in single cells but were released each day to work as factory or agrarian laborers” (Johnson, Dobrzanska, & Palla, 2014, p. 25).

According to Johnson, Dobrzanska, and Palla,

“Prisoners of this system slept in solitary cells, though they congregated in large groups for work and meals. Only their bodies mingled – silence reigned throughout the prison. They are united, but no moral connection exists among them. They see without knowing each other. They are in a society without social intercourse” (p. 25).

The congregate system “retained the monastic features of the separate system in its solitary cells and silent labor, but blended them with a more contemporary lifestyle” (Johnson, Dobrzanska, & Palla, 2014, p. 25). Structured employing quasi-military methods, the congregate penitentiary was rigidly scheduled and regulated the movements, habits, and activities of the incarcerated population with extreme authority. This regimentation was designed to produce docile, obedient

inmates who simultaneously sought the redemption of penance and purity (Johnson, Dobrzanska, & Palla, 2014).

The congregate system of imprisonment ultimately became the model of correctional philosophy and organization in the United States due to the economic forces of the nineteenth century. Because laborers were in short supply in nineteenth century America, the deployment of prisoners as factory labor provided an affordable alternative to the deficiency of the workforce (Johnson, Dobrzanska, & Palla, 2014). Building off of this primary system, “Big Houses” were constructed in the early 1900s to serve as maximum-security institutions that descended from the early penitentiary (Johnson, Dobrzanska, & Palla, 2014). In these prisons,

“A disciplined and often silent routine prevailed; prisoners worked, notably in such empty enterprises as the infamous rock pile, in which ax-wielding men broke rocks for no other reason than to show their submission to the prison authorities. The Big House prison, much like its rock piles, reflected no grand scheme or purpose; neither penance nor profits were sought. Routines were purposefully empty. Activities served no purpose other than to maintain order” (Johnson, Dobrzanska, & Palla, 2014, p. 30).

Initial “Big Houses”, especially those erected in the southern states, served as an extension of slave plantations and agrarian forced labor institutions. Known as “plantation prisons”, the object of these institutions was “disciplined labor of the most servile, backbreaking sort - penance was never given a second thought” (Johnson, Dobrzanska, & Palla, 2014, p. 30). These prisons housed a gross overrepresentation of black men, and incarcerated newly emancipated former African-American slaves on the flimsiest pretexts. These men were then chained together and forced to perform hard manual labor in what became known as the “chain gang” (Johnson, Dobrzanska, & Palla, 2014). In this way, early American prison systems, especially those rooted in the South, functioned as a continuation of enslavement and forced the unpaid labor of African-Americans post abolition and the Civil War era.

By the 1940s and 1950s, the term “Big House” manifested into the emergence of the modern contemporary correctional institution, where harsh discipline and repression by prison officials gradually became less salient features of incarceration (Johnson, Dobrzanska, & Palla, 2014). According to Johnson, Dobrzanska, and Palla,

“Correctional institutions were marked by a less intrusive discipline than that found at the Big Houses. They offered more yard and recreational privileges; more liberal mail and visitation policies; more amenities, including an occasional movie or concert; and more educational, vocational, and therapeutic programs, though these various remedial efforts seemed to be thrown in as window dressing. These changes made life in prison less oppressive. Even so, prisoners spent most of their time in their cells or engaged in some type of menial work. They soon discovered that free time could be “dead” time; like prisoners of the Big Houses before them, prisoners in correctional institutions often milled about the yard with nothing constructive to do. Boredom prevailed, though it was not the crush boredom born of regimentation as in the Big House. Gradually, considerable resentment developed: officials had promised programs but had not delivered them. The correctional institution promised to transform people – but mostly these institutions simply left prisoners more or less unchanged” (p. 34).

II. The Color of Incarceration

According to the government Bureau of Justice Statistics, “the total correctional population consists of all offenders under the supervision of adult correctional systems, which includes offenders supervised in the community under the authority of probation or parole agencies and those held in the custody of state or federal prisons or local jails” (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017). At the close of the year 2015, an estimated 6,741,400 persons were under the supervision of the United States adult correctional system (Kaeble & Glaze, 2016). This staggering statistic is representative of about one in every thirty-seven adults being monitored by a form of correctional supervision in the United States in the year 2015 (Kaeble & Glaze, 2016).

In March of 2009, researchers from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency published the report “*Created Equal: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the United States*

Criminal Justice System”, revealing a troubling trend on the basis of color and racial tone in the population of the United States correctional system. According to Christopher Hartney and Linh Vuong, “African-Americans make up thirteen percent of the general United States population, yet they constitute twenty-eight percent of all arrests, forty percent of all inmates held in prisons and jails, and forty-two percent of the population on death row” (Hartney & Vuong, 2009, p. 2). Hartney and Vuong contrast these statistics with that of the white racial group, finding that “whites make up sixty-seven percent of the total United States population and seventy percent of all arrests, yet only forty percent of all inmates held in state prisons or local jails and fifty-six percent of the population on death row” (Hartney & Vuong, 2009, p. 2).

In 2010, the Prison Policy Initiative, a non-partisan non-profit organization that produces groundbreaking research findings to expose the broad injustice of mass incarceration, released a report that further broke down the national criminal justice census into racial categories that agreed vehemently with the previous findings of the existing research produced by academics such as Hartney and Vuong. It found that blacks are five times more likely than whites to be incarcerated, while Hispanics are nearly twice as likely to be incarcerated as whites. It also stated that Hispanics represent nineteen percent of the national prison population, despite representing just sixteen percent of the general United States population (Sakala, 2014).

What this research ultimately points to is the presence of an inherent racism in the American criminal justice system that targets people of color, while forgiving their privileged white counterparts for identical criminal acts. The assertion that white privilege plays a starring role in the onset of unjust criminal justice practice in this country is extensively supported in works of related literature. This sentiment roots itself in the inherent acceptance of the American prison and law enforcement system as an entity stereotypically inhabited by men and women of

color. According to renowned criminologist and professor of law, Michael Tonry, a staggering one-third of all African American males born in the year 2001 will serve time in a state or federal prison and black males are seven times more likely than white males to be in prison (Tonry, 2012). Furthermore, “blacks are much more likely than whites to be stopped by the police, arrested, prosecuted, convicted, and imprisoned, and are much less likely to have confidence in justice system officials, especially the police” (Tonry, 2012).

According to Tonry, policies that disproportionately affect black Americans in the criminal justice system “stem from a lack of white empathy for black people, and from racial stereotypes and resentments provoked partly by the Republican Southern Strategy of using coded law and order appeals to gain support from white voters” (Tonry, 2012). As Tonry notes, “White Americans have a remarkable capacity to endure the suffering of disadvantaged black men” (Tonry, 2012). Throughout his book, Tonry points to the evidenced ability of whites to excuse police brutality against blacks because of the racial animosity and disposition they hold against the black community. Through the eyes of the dominant white community, blacks are deserving of the unfair and unjust treatment they receive in the criminal justice system due to longstanding prejudice, racism, and discrimination, which innately justifies the brutality they face at the hands of unlawful police officers and criminal justice officials.

In August of 2013, a report compiled by policy experts at The Sentencing Project agreed with the evident presence of discrimination in the modern criminal justice system, finding that “one of every three black American males born today can expect to go to prison in their lifetime, as can one of every six Latino males – compared to just one of every seventeen white males” (The Sentencing Project, 2013, p. 1). According to the report, “the source of such racial disparities is deeper and more systemic than explicit racial discrimination – the United States in

effect operates two distinct criminal justice systems: one for wealthy people and another for poor people and minorities” (The Sentencing Project, 2013, p. 1). In theory, the criminal justice system for poor people and minorities is defined as a vigorous adversary system replete with constitutional protections for defendants (The Sentencing Project, 2013). Yet in practice, the tangible experiences of the poor and minority defendants involved in the criminal justice system often differ substantially from the perceived model due to a number of factors, each of which contributes to the overrepresentation of certain individuals in the system (The Sentencing Project, 2013). According to Georgetown University Law professor, David Cole,

“These double standards are not, of course, explicit; on the face of it, the criminal law is color-blind and class-blind. But in a sense, this only makes the problem worse. The rhetoric of the criminal justice system sends the message that our society carefully protects everyone’s constitutional rights, but in practice the rules assure that the law enforcement prerogatives will generally prevail over the rights of minorities and the poor. By affording criminal suspects substantial constitutional rights in theory, the Supreme Court validates the results of the criminal justice system as fair. That formal fairness obscures the systemic concerns that ought to be raised by the fact that the prison population is overwhelmingly poor and disproportionately black” (The Sentencing Project, 2013, p. 2).

Robert Sampson and Janet Lauritsen argue in their article, *Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Crime and Criminal Justice in the United States* that the racial differences in the composition of the American criminal justice system are the result of social forces that ecologically concentrate race with poverty and other social dislocations (Sampson & Lauritsen, 1997). Sampson and Lauritsen evidence conflict theory in their discussion of criminal justice disparity, stating that “conflict theorists view society as consisting of groups with conflicting and differing values and posit that the state is organized to represent the interests of the powerful, ruling class” (Sampson & Lauritsen, 1997, p. 356). They continue to argue that

“Criminal law is thus viewed as an instrument to protect the interests of the powerful and the elite, and the punishment is based to a large extent on extralegal variables (e.g. race,

social class). A major proposition drawn from conflict theory is that groups which threaten the hegemony of middle and upper-class rule are more likely to be subjected to intensified social control – more criminalization, more formal processing by the criminal justice system, and increased incarceration compared with groups that are perceived as less threatening to the status quo. Conflict theorists have argued that minorities (especially blacks), the unemployed, and the poor represent such threatening groups” (Sampson & Lauritsen, 1997, p. 356).

In their argument, Sampson and Lauritsen state that “while there may indeed be a general consensus in society on core values, it is not the objective level of threat but rather the *symbolic* aspect of social conflict that may be the salient feature driving crime control” (Sampson & Lauritsen, 1997, p. 357). In this assertion, they suggest that it is the perceptions held by the elite class regarding the criminal nature of the poor and minority classes, rather than the actual threat they present that drives the uneven racial disparity of the criminal justice system. According to Sampson and Lauritsen, “the poor, the underclass, and the rabble (i.e. poor minorities) are perceived as threatening not only to political elites, but to mainstream America – middle-class and working-class citizens who represent the dominant majority in American society” (Sampson & Lauritsen, 1997, p. 358). In this decree, the threat of criminal deviance by a certain class of society is used as a tool to justify the disparate incarceration and sentencing of underrepresented social classes on the grounds of the perceived threat of a criminal act, rather than on the actual probability that a criminal act was committed.

Driven by the fundamental principles of conflict theory, it is clear that the disparity of racial minority populations and lower social classes involved in the criminal justice system stems from an American system that is inherently rooted in historical racism and discrimination. According to Martin Marger, “racism is an ideology or belief system designed to justify and rationalize racial and ethnic inequality” and discrimination is “most basically, a behavior aimed at denying members of particular ethnic groups equal access to societal rewards” (Marger, 2009).

Racial inequality originated in colonial America, as people of color were enslaved by white perpetrators who profited from forced labor at the expense of gross human rights violations. The system of slavery in the United States was further purported by the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin, who coined the term “Social Darwinism” to explain development as the survival of the fittest (Rutledge, 1995). Believing the white man to be the “fittest of the races”, slavery was viewed as a “continuous over-running of the less powerful or less adapted by the more powerful or more adapted, a driving of inferior varieties into undesirable habitats, and occasionally, an extermination of inferior varieties” (Rutledge, 1995).

Through the systems of Social Darwinism and slavery, racism and discrimination became a means of legitimizing the unequal treatment of the black population by white males in positions of power. William Graham Sumner, a leading Social Darwinist during the Civil War era even legitimized the system of slavery by stating that “because slavery permitted superior groups the leisure to construct and develop more refined cultures, it actually advanced the cause of humanity” (Rutledge, 1995). These beliefs cemented a foundation of the black population as inferior to their white counterparts in the United States that persisted despite the abolition of slavery during the Civil War era. Today, cases of uneven racial and social representation in the criminal justice system show the manifestation of modern day slavery, the institutionalized racism of American society, and the disadvantages the black and minority community face due to the evident white privileges offered to the dominant white male race in society.

White privilege can perhaps be best described as “an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and bank checks” that white people are automatically afforded in society based on the color of their skin (McIntosh, 1990). It is a system of rights and privileges encoded in daily life that propels the notion of “racism being

a tool to disadvantage black people while simultaneously putting white people at a distinct advantage” (McIntosh, 1990). White privilege is a set of unearned profitable assets possessed by white people that they themselves are utterly oblivious to owning, and include the ability to rent property in a desirable neighborhood, widespread visual representation of their dominant race in the media, the power to earn employment based on merit rather than affirmative action requirements, and the capability to exercise freedom of speech without being deemed a cultural outsider (McIntosh, 1990). And when it comes to the criminal justice system, white privilege also includes the ability to seek legal or law enforcement aid and services without skin color playing a detrimental role.

The research evidenced here supports the hypothesis of the existence of an intertwined correlated relationship between white privilege and racial disparity in the United States criminal justice system. Ultimately, white privilege serves as a mechanism to excuse the consequence of this disparity, similar to the way that racism serves as a mechanism to excuse the consequence of discrimination. The modern criminal justice system foundationally and fundamentally lacks equality, and continues to function as a systematic continuation of slavery and oppression against people of color in the United States. Minorities are not the only people committing criminal acts in American communities, but they are being punished for their actions at rates far greater than their white majority counterparts. As a result, the criminal justice system has become flooded with minority offenders, which has contributed immensely to the continued struggle of historically disadvantaged populations in the United States.

III. Mass Incarceration and the War on Drugs

In 2010, associate professor of law and civil rights advocate Michelle Alexander published the book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, which theorized

that the rise of mass incarceration in the United States functioned as a modern form of the discriminatory Jim Crow laws erected in the American south as a mechanism of racial segregation post-Reconstruction (Alexander, 2010). Challenging the myth that discrimination largely ended as a result of the civil reform movement of the 1960s, Alexander's book proclaims that the American criminal justice system utilized the legislative declaration of the War on Drugs as a legal tool for the enforcement of widespread discrimination and repression against the black and minority community. According to Alexander,

“What has changed since the collapse of Jim Crow has less to do with the basic structure of our society than with the language we use to justify it. In the era of colorblindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt. So we don't. Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice system to label people of color “criminals” and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind. Today it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the ways that it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans. Once you're labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination – employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service – are suddenly legal. As a criminal, you have scarcely more rights, and arguably less respect, than a black man living in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it” (Alexander, 2010, p. 2).

According to Alexander, the redesign of the racial caste system via the rise of mass incarceration in the United States can be heavily attributed to the War on Drugs, as “convictions for drug offenses are the single most important cause of the explosion in incarceration rates in the United States” (Alexander, 2010). In her research findings, Alexander summarizes that

“Drug offenses alone account for two-thirds of the rise in the federal inmate population and more than half of the rise in state prisoners between 1985 and 2000. Approximately a half-million people are in prison or jail for a drug offense today, compared to an estimated 41,100 in 1980 – an increase of 1,100 percent. Drug arrests have tripled since 1980. As a result, more than thirty-one million people have been arrested for drug offenses since the war began” (Alexander, 2010).

Alexander's research further finds that the vast majority of offenders arrested for drug crimes are not charged with serious offenses and that in the year 2005 four in five drug arrests were for possession, while only one in five were for sales. Alexander also asserts that "arrests for marijuana possession – a drug often viewed as being less harmful than tobacco or alcohol – accounted for nearly eighty percent of the growth in drug arrests in the 1990s" (Alexander, 2010). This statistic is highly alarming, as it accounts for a sizable percentage of all arrests during the war on the grounds of a drug that is widely used and debatably safe for recreational use in comparison to most other illegal substances.

The War on Drugs is a term used popularly in American history to describe the government's highly publicized campaign to crack down on recreational drug use and prohibit the illegal drug trade in the United States. The war was erected as a drug policy initiative by the presidential administration of Richard Nixon in 1971 to "protect and serve" the nation by discouraging the production, distribution, and consumption of illegal drugs in American communities (Moore & Elkavich, 2008). Following this declaration of war, Nixon's administration "drastically increased the size and presence of federal drug control agencies, and pushed through policy measures such as mandatory sentencing and no-knock warrants" (Drug Policy Alliance, 2017).

According to the argument presented by Michael Tonry in the journal article "*Race and the War on Drugs*", "the ostensible goals of the War on Drugs were to reduce drug use and trafficking" (Tonry, *Race and the War on Drugs*, 1994, p. 26). Yet "there is no evidence that crime control efforts reduced levels of drug use in the United States – drug use was declining years before the war was declared, and the war can claim no credit for the continuation of pre-existing trends" (Tonry, *Race and the War on Drugs*, 1994, p. 26). Furthermore, it cannot be

proven with conviction that the war overwhelmingly succeeded in its quest to eliminate the trafficking of narcotics throughout America's urban neighborhoods. According to Tonry,

“Drug policy analysts generally use drug prices as a measure of law enforcement effectiveness; if drugs are harder to find, they should be more expensive. The street price of cocaine, the war's signature drug, should have risen if dealing was becoming riskier and drugs less available; prices fell. Massive arrests and street swap tactics in many cities, backed up by harsh mandatory prison sentences, should have cleared out the drug dealers and made drugs harder to find; they did not. Most analysts and many police officials believe that arrested street dealers are nearly always replaced by others who are willing to take the risks in order to gain incomes not otherwise available in high poverty neighborhoods” (Tonry, *Race and the War on Drugs*, 1994, p. 26).

While seen as an inevitable failure for its inability to accomplish the policy goals indicated above by Tonry, the War on Drugs was successful in its pursuit and capture of low level drug users in impoverished urban communities of color. The “doubling of arrests in the 1980s, combined with harsher penalties, more than doubled the police, jail, prosecution, and court case flows and costs associated with drugs”, which contributed principally to the enormous spike in the national offender and correctional population (Tonry, *Race and the War on Drugs*, 1994, p. 26). To prove this statement, Tonry cites the following empirical data results:

“Drug offense sentences are the single most important cause of the trebling of the national prison population since 1980. In the federal prisons, for example, drug offenders constituted twenty-two percent of admissions in 1980, thirty-nine percent in 1988, and forty-two percent in 1990. In 1980, twenty-five percent (4,912) of federal prisoners were drug offenders; by 1991, fifty-six percent (30,754) were drug offenders; and by 1992, fifty-nine percent were drug offenders” (Tonry, *Race and the War on Drugs*, 1994, p. 26).

The hasty proliferation in arrests for drug related offenses was a product of the directives forced upon local governments by the declaration of the national War on Drugs campaign.

Lawrence Bobo and Victor Thompson confirm this assertion by stating that “while federal, state, and local mandates pursued a War on Drugs, local police departments were under pressure to

show progress – the quickest way to show results (arrests) is to enhance policing and arrest in already disadvantaged neighborhoods, which are disproportionately poor and black” (Bobo & Thompson, 2006, p. 451). As a result of the enhancement of policing in disadvantaged neighborhoods, the War on Drugs became more than a crusade to remove drug lords and recreational narcotic users from American society – it became a crusade against racial minorities. According to Deborah Small,

“United States drug laws, while superficially neutral, are enforced in a manner that is massively and pervasively biased. In a country with “equal rights for all”, one out of every three black men in their twenties is now in prison or jail, on probation, or parole on any given day. Blacks constitute thirteen percent of all drug users, but thirty-five percent of those arrested for drug possession, fifty-five percent of those convicted, and seventy-four percent of those sent to prison. In some states the racial disparity in arrests and convictions for drug offenses is much worse. In seven states, blacks constitute between seventy-five and ninety percent of all drug offenders sent to prison. In New York, over ninety-four percent of inmates incarcerated for drug offenses are black or Latino. In at least fifteen states, black men are sent to prison for drug offenses at rates that are from twenty to fifty-seven times greater than for white men. The disproportionate arrests – and media coverage – feed the mistaken assumption that blacks use drugs at higher rates than whites and serve as justification for continued racial profiling” (Small, 2001, p. 897).

Since 1984, Congress has enforced the platform of the drug war via the use of mandatory minimum sentences specifically targeted at offenses involving narcotic use and trafficking (Caulkins, Rydell, Schwabe, & Chiesa, 1997). In 1986, Congress significantly altered their national sentencing policy to focus on drug trafficking and distribution offenses by tying minimum penalties to the gross weight of the drugs involved in the offense (Caulkins, Rydell, Schwabe, & Chiesa, 1997). As a result, America’s prisons exploded with first time offenders forcibly sent to prison for x number of years due to the government’s harsh policies. These policies included sentences such as five years’ imprisonment for simple possession of crack cocaine, but “federal mandatory minimum sentences range from fifteen days to life

imprisonment without parole, while actual sentences may be higher than minimum and be augmented by fines and up to ten years of supervision after release” (Caulkins, Rydell, Schwabe, & Chiesa, 1997, p. 10). According to the government, these mandatory sentences were designed to achieve the following five objectives: retribution, deterrence, incapacitation (especially of the serious offender), elimination of sentencing disparity, inducement of cooperation, and the inducement of pleas (Caulkins, Rydell, Schwabe, & Chiesa, 1997).

Ultimately, the War on Drugs was a crusade against minority enclaves in urban neighborhoods that exploited the guidelines of mandatory minimum sentences as a mechanism for the mass imprisonment of low level drug users and offenders. As a result of the declaration of war, drug related crimes and offenses have clogged the American judicial system for the past forty years and imprisoned nonviolent offenders for fixed amounts of time that cannot be lowered, regardless of any extenuating circumstances. Today, drug offenses account for over three quarters of all crimes carrying a mandatory sentencing penalty, and of the 23,964 drug offenders reported to the United States Sentencing Commission in 2010, over sixty-six percent were convicted of a drug crime that carried a mandatory minimum penalty (United States Sentencing Commission, 2010). Mandatory minimum sentences used in the cases of drug offenders are inherently flawed in that they excessively punish individuals in need of substance abuse rehabilitation and intensive therapy rather than solitary confinement and years behind bars. According to the Sentencing Commission report, the average inmate sentenced under mandatory minimum laws for drug offenses receive a prison sentence of one hundred thirty-two months – the equivalent of eleven years. These extenuating sentences are a direct result of the United States governmental policy that chose to handle substance abuse as a criminal matter, rather than a concern of physical and mental health via the declaration of the War on Drugs.

IV. Parents in Prison and their Children

According to The Sentencing Project, a Washington D.C. based nonprofit social services agency that has lobbied for a fair and effective national criminal justice system since 1986 by promoting reforms in sentencing policy, addressing unjust racial disparities and practices, and advocating for alternatives to incarceration, fifty-two percent of people in state prisons and sixty-three percent of people in federal prisons were the parent of at least one child under the age of eighteen in the year 2004 (The Sentencing Project, 2012). While the data shows that fathers primarily serve as the incarcerated parent in the criminal justice system, the report found that there were nearly 66,000 incarcerated mothers in the United States in 2007 as well. Between 1991 and 2007, the number of fathers in prison increased by seventy-six percent and the number of mothers in prison increased by an astonishing one hundred twenty-two percent (The Sentencing Project, 2012).

To put these numbers into perspective, there were over 1.7 million children in the United States with a parent presently detained behind bars on any given day in the year 2007 (The Sentencing Project, 2012). This number represented an eighty percent increase in the number of children with an incarcerated parent since 1991. Congruent to the trends within the general national inmate population, the ratios of children with an incarcerated parent is highly disproportionate between racial groupings. The Sentencing Project found that one in forty-three children in the United States had an incarcerated parent, which broke out into one in fifteen black children, one in forty-two Latino children, and one in one hundred eleven white children having a parent in prison in the year 2007. These ratios empirically equate to black children having a seven and a half times greater probability than white children of having an incarcerated parent,

while Hispanic children have a three times greater probability than white children of having a parent in prison.

In contrast to the general population, incarcerated parents are statistically more likely to have faced an array of personal challenges and problems prior to their arrest that increased their risk of imprisonment and the risk of social and emotional problems extended to their children. As found in the report produced by The Sentencing Project, nine percent of parents in prison were homeless in the year before their arrest, twenty percent were physically or sexually abused, thirty-eight percent had not obtained a high school diploma or GED certification, forty-one percent presented with infectious medical problems such as tuberculosis, hepatitis, HIV, and other sexually transmitted diseases, fifty-seven percent had current mental health problems, and sixty-seven percent had a recent history of alcohol or drug abuse (The Sentencing Project, 2012). It was also found that little was being accomplished behind prison walls to combat the personal barriers and challenges inmates entered the criminal justice system possessing. According to the report, only a small fraction of incarcerated parents received services and supports to alleviate and address the problems that contributed to their justice-involvement. A meager twelve percent received parenting or child-rearing classes in prison, just thirty percent accessed educational programs and opportunities, only thirty-one percent of parents in need received mental health counseling and treatment, and merely forty-two percent of parents with alcohol or drug abuse problems received treatment to address their addiction while in prison (The Sentencing Project, 2012).

Despite the tribulations stipulated above that are statistically linked to increasing the risk of parental incarceration, a majority of incarcerated parents were directly involved in their children's lives prior to their arrest. According to research data compiled by the National

Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated at Rutgers University, fifty-five percent of fathers had at least one minor child living with them prior to their incarceration, while eighty-four percent of mothers had at least one minor child living with them prior to their incarceration (National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated). Upon their incarceration, two percent of fathers and ten percent of mothers had children residing in non-kinship foster care homes and agencies, where twenty percent of the total state care committed youth population has an incarcerated parent (National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated). The data also explained that twenty percent of children live with their father when their mother is incarcerated, ninety percent of children live with their mother when their father is incarcerated, and that fifty percent of children with an incarcerated mother reside with their grandmothers (National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated).

Regardless of the organized living arrangements, contact between an incarcerated parent and their minor children is difficult to maintain. According to the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated, fifty-nine percent of fathers and fifty-eight percent of mothers did not receive a personal visit from their children during their time behind bars. One contributing factor to this lack of in-person visitation is the distance between incarcerated parents and the communities in which their children reside. Sixty-two percent of parents in state prisons and eighty-four percent of parents in federal prisons are held over one hundred miles from their home residence, while forty-three percent of parents in federal prisons are held over five hundred miles from their residence prior to their arrest (National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated). This great distance makes arranging and supporting travel for children to and from many prisons difficult, especially for those families whose children are left

in the care of elderly grandparents or extended kinship members, and for families under tight financial constraints.

Despite the great distances between incarcerated parents and their children, research finds that more than three-quarters of parents in state prison reported having had at least some contact with their child, whether minor or adult (Eddy & Poehlmann, 2010). Seventy percent of these parents in state prison said they had exchanged letters with their children, fifty-three percent said that they had spoken over the phone, and forty-two percent said that they had received a visit from their child since the beginning of their sentence (Eddy & Poehlmann, 2010). Mothers were more likely than fathers to have contact with their children – however, the likelihood that a parent had maintained contact with their child decreased significantly as their time served increased. Of parents who had been in prison for sixty or more months, twenty-four percent reported writing letters, twenty percent reported talking on the phone, and only five percent reported seeing their child during a personal visit (Eddy & Poehlmann, 2010). These research statistics ultimately formulate the hypothesis that an incarcerated parent is less likely to maintain contact with their children the longer they are imprisoned.

The ability of an incarcerated parent to maintain contact with their children during their sentence often depends on who is caring for the children during that time. According to statistical findings, “mothers in state prison most commonly identified the child’s grandmother (forty-two percent) as the current caregiver” (Eddy & Poehlmann, 2010). However, mothers were five times more likely than fathers to have children in the care of a foster home, agency, or institution while in prison. Remarkably, “research specific to incarcerated mothers and their children’s risk of placement in foster care revealed that in three-quarters of all cases, children were not placed in

foster care as a direct result of the incarceration – rather, they had already been placed in foster care before the mother’s incarceration” (Eddy & Poehlmann, 2010).

Ultimately, a child will face numerous negative effects regardless of the stability of their living situation due to the incarceration of their parent. According to the text, *“Prisoners Once Removed: The Impact of Incarceration and Reentry on Children, Families, and Communities”*, “incarceration is not a single or discrete event, but a dynamic process that unfolds over time” (20). The text continues to emphasize,

“Understanding the impact of the incarceration process on children requires considering separately the short-term effects of the parent’s arrest and the removal of the child from the parent, the impact of the parent’s unavailability to the child during the period of incarceration, and the effects – both positive and negative – of reunion after the incarceration period” (199).

These effects, vast in number and severity, can be quite debilitating to the positive growth and development of children with parents in prison. The loss of a parent due to incarceration extends consequences to all sectors of a child’s health and wellbeing, and can have a significant effect on the life outcome of this vulnerable population.

V. Effects of Parental Incarceration on Children

The nation’s rapidly growing prison population in the era of mass incarceration is an especially daunting social justice issue in the United States due to the collateral damage that incarceration extends to the children, families, and communities that are left behind. Parental incarceration disrupts the presence and continued development of positive, nurturing relationships between a parent and their child, and increases the risk of that child being exposed to a host of harmful side effects and situations. According to Columbia University researcher Julie Smyth,

“Of the innumerable problems associated with mass incarceration, one of the most serious, and often ignored repercussions is the lifelong harm inflicted upon a child with an incarcerated parent – children with incarcerated parents are often referred to as “hidden victims” because they bear the heavy burden of a crime they did not commit” (Smyth, 2012).

Incarceration is an especially heavy burden on the family unit as it tends to be a compounding trauma experienced in the presence of other difficulties. According to Lois Wright and Cynthia Seymour, “more often than not, an array of social, cultural, and familial risk factors coexists, each adding perhaps only a small increment to the totality of risk for the child and family” (Wright & Seymour, 2000). While no single factor serves as a concrete predictor of particular child difficulties, negative outcomes can be predicted from an accumulative array of factors – the more endangering factors present, the greater the ultimate risk to the child (Wright & Seymour, 2000). In the wake of parental incarceration, these endangering factors can include the emotional and psychological trauma of separation, increased family disintegration and dysfunction, residential and financial instability, developmental challenges, social stigma and emotional pain, and a greater likelihood of exposure to poverty (The Osborne Association, 2013).

According to the conclusions detailed in the Osborne Association report on children with incarcerated parents, risk factors among children of incarcerated parents operate along two common pathways:

1. Parental problems that existed prior to and may have contributed to the parent’s incarceration (e.g. addiction, mental illness, domestic violence)
2. Problems introduced as a result of the incarceration (e.g. family and school disruption, trauma, grief, stigma) (The Osborne Association, 2013).

These risk factors are ultimately heightened by the recognition of parental incarceration as an adverse childhood experience (ACE) as developed by the Center for Disease Control and

Prevention (The Osborne Association, 2013). When a child is exposed to multiple ACE's in their development, the risk of their suffering long-term negative mental health and general health outcomes significantly increases. However parental incarceration is an especially serious ACE indicator in that it reflects a unique combination of trauma, stigma, and shame and is often experienced in unison with other ACE events – posing an even greater overall risk to the future outcome and well-being of the child.

According to research produced by David Murphey and P. Mae Cooper, children who have experienced the incarceration of a resident parent possess an average ACE score of 2.7, while children who have not experienced parental incarceration have an average ACE score of only 0.7 (Murphey & Cooper, 2015). The increase in ACE indicators among children with incarcerated parents stems from their exposure to deregulated environments throughout childhood that are often rooted in traumatic experiences. Research evidences that among children of incarcerated parents, more than half have lived with someone who has a substance abuse problem, compared with less than ten percent among children with no history of parental incarceration, and nearly three in five had experienced parental divorce or separation, compared with one in five of the children who had not experienced parental incarceration (Murphey & Cooper, 2015). Furthermore, more than one-third of the children with incarcerated parents had witnessed violence between their parents or guardians, and one-third had witnessed or personally experienced violence in their neighborhood. In comparison, less than ten percent of children who had not experienced parental incarceration had experienced violence in either immediate form (Murphey & Cooper, 2015). The research also concluded that more than twenty-five percent of children with incarcerated parents had lived with someone who was mentally ill or suicidal, and nearly one in ten had experienced the untimely death of a parent (Murphey & Cooper, 2015).

Collectively, these individual experiences compound throughout childhood and adolescence to produce an ACE score that poses tremendous physical, social, emotional, and mental health risks to children of incarcerated parents. Parental incarceration conveys added risk to the positive development of endangered and vulnerable children, which is manifested in their troubling familiarity with events characterized as adverse childhood experiences.

Along the two distinct risk-factor pathways operated on by children of incarcerated parents as introduced by The Osborne Association, there exists a set of five guiding assumptions that researchers identify as important in their examination of the ill effects of parental incarceration on children. According to Ross D. Parke and K. Alison Clarke-Stewart, these principles are:

1. The child is located in a family system, and to understand incarceration's impact on the child, we should consider the network of relationships within the family system
2. The child's developmental level at the time of parental incarceration and the quality of the child's relationship with the incarcerated parent are important
3. The incarcerated parent's gender should be considered, because separation from a mother may affect a child differently than separation from a father
4. The characteristics of the extended kin network in which the family is located are relevant
5. The nature and availability of formal institutional supports for the family should be examined (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003, pp. 189-190).

These assumptions must be acknowledged and presented in summarizing the effects of parental incarceration on children, as they influence the severity of the risk factors to which children are exposed to when a parent is incarcerated.

In formatting these principles, researchers have utilized the rational basis of a variety of theoretical perspectives to study the effects of parental incarceration on children. The first of these theories originates from a developmental perspective, and stems from the work of Bowlby's attachment theory (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003). According to Bowlby, "the lack of regular and sustained contact between an infant (or child) and parent will prevent the

development of their attachment to the parent” (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003, p. 193). Bowlby further alleges that once an attachment is formed, separation from the parent can generate a series of adverse emotional reactions within the child, ranging from sadness to anger that disrupts their ultimate development (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003). An underlying understanding of attachment theory is critical in interpreting the effects of parental incarceration on children, as researchers must realize the developmental attachment between the parent and the child, but also the developmental attachment of the child to the extended care network that they reside in as a result of the incarceration.

Researchers also utilize the principles of the life-span theoretical perspective in their study of children with incarcerated parents. According to the life-span theory of development, “development is a process that continues throughout the life cycle into adulthood – childhood is important, but other ages also significantly shape later stages of development” (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003, p. 194). The life-span theory recognizes three sets of causes that foster change in development over time. The first set includes normative events and experiences, such as starting school, reaching puberty, and graduating from college (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003). The second set includes unexpected events and experiences, such as job loss, divorce, and the sudden death of a family member that pushes development in a new direction (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003). Incarceration falls into this category of unexpected events and experiences, and is significant because “for incarcerated parents, living in a violent, inhumane, and dangerous environment will inevitably affect their attitudes and behavior in ways that are likely to persist after the incarceration” (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003, p. 194). These attitudes and behaviors, whether conscious or unconscious, are experienced, recognized, and witnessed by the child, which inadvertently impacts their positive development throughout childhood. Historical time

periods and social trends constitute the third set of events that can influence individual development, as they provide the basis for the social conditions of the family, which vary in the wake of events such as parental incarceration (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003).

Systems theory is also employed in the study of the effects of parental incarceration on children, as it examines development outside of the individual and analyzes it at the dyadic and family level (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003). The systems theory acknowledges that changes in the family structure create interrelated stressors and problems through the entirety of the family unit, who then must adapt to temporary or permanent changes in the structure, including the loss of a parent due to incarceration. Researchers also point to the risk and resiliency theory to assess the differing outcomes for children with incarcerated parents based on their individual responses to adverse experiences and employ cumulative risk models to acknowledge that “risks often occur and are best understood not as single events but as sets or combinations of events” (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003, p. 196). In the comprehensive study of children with incarcerated parents, these theories are correlated into an overarching framework, designed to create a fuller understanding of the theoretical perspectives related to researching the effects of parental incarceration on children. In the introduction of this framework, the impacts of parental incarceration and the risk factors that children are exposed to in the aftermath of their parent’s arrest can be better understood.

There are ultimately a host of risk factors that children with incarcerated parents face prior to and throughout the parent’s prison sentence that increases the number of adverse childhood experiences inflicted upon them. Poverty and economic instability is among the most prevalent of these risk factors. According to Lois Wright and Cynthia Seymour, parents are apt to have been living in poverty before their incarceration and to have been unable to economically

provide basic material resources (Wright & Seymour, 2000). As a result, poverty is often the core issue that is central to a range of other difficulties submitting negative consequences to children, including living in impoverished neighborhoods and experiencing limited parental educational achievement and limited parental job prospects (Wright & Seymour, 2000). The abuse of alcohol and other illegal substances operates along a similar pathway as poverty. The abuse of substances is associated with poor neighborhoods, child mistreatment, and other social ills, which severely limits the user's ability to function appropriately across a range of life roles – including childrearing and parenting (Wright & Seymour, 2000).

Exposure to criminal activity is another adverse effect distributed to children with incarcerated parents, as their residence in an environment of criminal activity (either of the parent's own or in the resident neighborhood) has documented effects on children. These effects include the mental and emotional strain of living in constant fear, and the acceptance of constant danger as a normal characteristic of daily life (Wright & Seymour, 2000). Interfamilial violence is also commonly experienced by children with incarcerated parents, as the parent is often either battered or a batterer, whose children have been exposed to the regular and continued presence of domestic violence (Wright & Seymour, 2000). This exposure negatively effects children in that it strikes fear and guilt within their emotions, and desensitizes the child to the realities of violence (Wright & Seymour, 2000). In some cases, the incidence of domestic abuse extends to the mistreatment of the child as well, as the “abuse or neglect of a child for some period before incarceration or as a precipitating factor in the incarceration is well documented as having a range of effects on children” (Wright & Seymour, 2000).

Princeton University, interested in assessing the sociological and economic risk factors faced by children born to predominantly unwed and high-risk parents, conducted the “Fragile

Families and Child Wellbeing Study”, which followed a cohort of nearly five thousand children born in large American cities between the years 1998 and 2000. Roughly three quarters of the children in the cohort were born to unmarried parents, and the term “fragile families” was coined as a way to underscore that these families were at a greater risk of breaking up and living in poverty than traditional familial units. The core study consisted of interviews with both mothers and fathers at the time of the child’s birth, and again at ages one, three, five, and nine, and in-home assessments of the “fragile family” at ages three, five, and nine. Via these conversations and observations, interviewers collected information on attitudes, relationships, parenting behavior, demographic characteristics, mental and physical health, economic and employment status, neighborhood characteristics, and program participation.

It was ultimately found that a substantial number of the participants in the “Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study” had experienced incarceration at some point in their child’s life course. According to a report compiled in the aftermath of the study, three percent of the fathers in the study missed the birth of their child due to incarceration (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2014). By the third year following the child’s birth, forty-five percent of the unmarried fathers and ten percent of the married fathers in the study reported having ever been incarcerated, while seven percent of the unmarried mothers and two percent of the married mothers in the study reported having ever been incarcerated (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2014).

Incarceration was found to contribute to a number of negative child and family outcomes amongst the participants of the study. Outcomes related to economic instability and hardship were among the most prevalent of these, as it was found that “a parent’s incarceration is likely to lead to challenges in employment, which in turn place children at risk of having unmet needs”

(Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2014). The study concluded that “incarceration incapacitates the parent from the regular labor market while incarcerated, and is associated with difficulties securing stable employment upon release” (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2014). It was also found that parental incarceration was detrimental to the children in the study because of the resulting family instability it caused, which in turn contributed to the adverse development of the child. As a result of parental incarceration, the researchers found that the children of incarcerated parents in the study suffered physical and mental health ailments, behavioral problems, and showed slower cognitive development than the control population in the study (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2014).

Particular observations drawn from analysis of the study found that at the age of three, children of incarcerated fathers exhibited behavioral problems at rates that far exceeded their counterparts. After controlling for parental characteristics such as race, age at the child’s birth, impulsivity, and educational attainment, children whose fathers have a history of incarceration were fifty percent more likely than their counterparts to exhibit borderline or clinically aggressive behavior (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2014). These children also displayed an increase in anxious and depressive behavior in relation to the control group (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2014). The study also concluded that children of incarcerated parents are significantly less likely to live in two-parent households during their upbringing, and are significantly more likely to face material hardship, including the reliance of public assistance for survival (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2014).

Research also evidences that children of incarcerated parents are more likely than their counterparts to suffer from an array of psychological problems including trauma, anxiety, guilt, shame, and fear (Simmons, 2000). These psychological impediments often manifest in

behavioral difficulties that include sadness and depression, withdrawal, low self-esteem, poor school performance, truancy, and an increased probability of experimentation with drugs and alcohol (Simmons, 2000). A California study of thirty-six children between the ages of five and sixteen participating in a visitation program at a women's prison conducted by Dr. Charlene Wear Simmons found that "three quarters of the children reported negative symptoms including depression, difficulty sleeping, concentration problems, flashbacks about their mother's crimes or arrests, and poor school performance" (Simmons, 2000, p. 6). Further research findings fault parental incarceration for the impairment of parent-child bonding, anxiety, developmental regression, acute traumatic stress, survivor guilt, reactive behavior, rejection of limits, and intergenerational crime and incarceration (Simmons, 2000).

According to an article published in the Education Week journal detailing the toll of parental incarceration on children, "studies show that parental incarceration can be more traumatic to students than even a parent's death or divorce, and the damage it can cause to students' education, health, and social relationships puts them at higher risk of one day going to prison themselves" (Sparks, 2015). Research finds that children of incarcerated parents have higher rates of attention deficit disorders than children with absent parents due to death or divorce, and higher rates of behavioral problems, speech and language delays, and other developmental delays (Sparks, 2015). These impairments have proven to be detrimental to the educational attainment of impacted children, as only one to two percent of students with incarcerated mothers and thirteen to twenty-five percent of students with incarcerated fathers will eventually graduate from a post-secondary education program (Sparks, 2015). According to student affairs educator and author Amy Friedman, it is the immense feelings of stress and shame that make the loss of a parent due to incarceration especially traumatic. As she states, "The

things that come up the most with a parent inside is this feeling that you are going to be just like them, and there is this fear and loss and disappointment that translates to depression in a lot of kids” (Sparks, 2015).

Of the innumerable effects that parental incarceration diverts to children, it is the depressing curiosity on the prospects of children’s future life chances that is of special consideration in this research endeavor. Suffocated by the circumstances of their parent’s absence, children with incarcerated caregivers suffer from a unique set of developmental problems with long-term implications for the direction of their adolescent and adult life. While these long-term implications cannot be fully understood through current research, one conclusion is evident – a prison sentence for a parent is ultimately a life sentence of some negative type for their child as well.

VI. Parental Incarceration and the Risk of Eventual Justice-Involvement

Children of incarcerated parents face immense social stigmatization in their communities, which is derived in part from the belief that children of incarcerated parents are highly more likely to become justice-involved than their counterparts (Conway & Jones, 2015). Unsupported claims published in existing research routinely cite children of incarcerated parents to be six times more likely than other children to become justice-involved, and allege that seven out of ten children with a parent in prison will eventually be involved in the justice system (Conway & Jones, 2015).

The research of Conway and Jones published in conjunction with an initiative on parental incarceration at Central Connecticut State University argues against these estimations, blaming the inaccurate statistics for the exacerbation of stigmatization faced by children of incarcerated parents. According to their conclusions,

“Stigmatization has been described as a process consisting of five key elements. Those elements are: (1) distinguishing and labeling differences, (2) associating labeled differences with negative attributes, (3) differentiating between “us” and “them” based on labeled differences, and (4) the devaluation and discrimination of labeled individuals, all of which (5) occur within the context of and serve to perpetuate differences in social, cultural, political, and economic power” (Conway & Jones, 2015, p. 6).

These elements manifest powerfully in the lives of affected children, as teachers working with children of incarcerated parents admitted to stigmatizing the students, being unsupportive of the circumstance, and expecting less from them than other students (Conway & Jones, 2015). In a follow-up study, teachers were asked to evaluate scenarios about a child’s hypothetical incarcerated mother. The results indicated that children with an incarcerated mother were rated as being less competent students than children with a mother in rehab, away at school, or absent for other reasons (Conway & Jones, 2015). Stigma was also found to play an indirect role in the case management of children with incarcerated parents in the juvenile justice system, as research found that children with an incarcerated father were more likely to receive an out-of-home placement than were other children, even when other variables such as family dysfunction and the child’s prior referrals to juvenile court were taken into account (Conway & Jones, 2015).

These studies indicate the degree to which the stigmatization of children with incarcerated parents are labeled, and their associated devaluation based on their parent’s absence. Conway and Jones allege that the stigmatization of children with incarcerated parents has been unfairly promoted by the publicized claims of their probability of demise, and state that “while the “seven out of ten” and “six times more likely” claims have been intended to draw attention to the plight of children with incarcerated parents and to advocate for resources and services, they may in fact be promoting stigmatization” (Conway & Jones, 2015, p. 7). They find “the fact that the claims are made publicly without documentary evidence to be disturbing”, and assert that

there is a need to provide accurate information via a thorough review of the existing evidence (Conway & Jones, 2015, p. 7).

In their conclusions, Conway and Jones ultimately determine that the best estimate is that slightly more than three out of ten children of incarcerated parents will become justice-involved and that impacted children are three times more likely than other children to become justice-involved as a result of the circumstance of parental incarceration (Conway & Jones, 2015). These findings do indicate an elevated level of justice-involvement for children of incarcerated parents, although the level is substantially lower than the existing research has widely claimed.

Researchers Nkechi Taifa and Catherine Beane corroborated the presence of an intergenerational cycle of incarceration amongst children of incarcerated parents by affirming that the “literature suggests that parental separation due to imprisonment can have profound consequences for children, including intergenerational patterns of criminal behavior” (Taifa & Beane, 2009, p. 289). To substantiate these assertions, the researchers pointed to a recent survey that indicated forty-six percent of polled jail inmates had a family member who had been incarcerated (Taifa & Beane, 2009). This trend extends to the juvenile justice system as well, where parental criminal involvement is perhaps the strongest predictor of offending among youth, with more than half of the children in the juvenile system reporting at least one parent in prison (Feig, 2015). According to research,

“The way in which parental incarceration affects children varies as a function of the complex interplay between individual and contextual factors at the relational, community, and societal level. Individual factors include but are not limited to the child’s age, temperament, gender, and coping skills. Examples of contextual factors include the gender of the incarcerated parent, the quality of the parent-child relationship – emotional and financial – prior to the arrest of the parent, the relationship between the child’s caregiver and the incarcerated parent, whether or not the child witnessed the arrest of the parent, the length of incarceration, the amount of time the child spends with the incarcerated parent, the distance between the child’s home and the prison, prison visiting

arrangements and policies, and access to programs for incarcerated parents and their children” (Feig, 2015).

These individual and contextual factors manifest differently in children of incarcerated parents, although patterns of more consistent findings are observed depending on the gender of the incarcerated parent. For example, “children who experience maternal incarceration are more likely to suffer from internalizing problems, such as anxiety and depression, and to go into foster care; whereas paternal incarceration is associated with externalizing problems, including violence and aggression” (Feig, 2015). From these conclusions, the research draws a connection between the risk factors indicated above and the manifestation of internal and external behaviors among children of incarceration parents that increases their own risk of eventual justice-involvement.

Intergenerational transmission of offending, criminally deviant behavior, and incarceration is a multidimensional cycle that is closely interlinked with family poverty, neighborhood decline, and an array of issues related to the childrearing process and parental absence due to incarceration (Ng, Sarri, & Stoffregen, 2013). Existing literature cites the highly disadvantaged family and neighborhood origins of incarcerated populations, as well as the preexisting family instability and dysfunctional parenting as factors in the negative outcomes that are observed for youth suffering from parental incarceration (Ng, Sarri, & Stoffregen, 2013). These outcomes include depression, hyperactivity, aggression, withdrawal, sleep and eating disorders, truancy, poor school performance, and various conduct disorders (Ng, Sarri, & Stoffregen, 2013). Based off of these findings, it is concluded that “youth who have a parent with a history of incarceration will likely have experienced and will continue to experience various types of disadvantages that greatly hinder any chance of integration to society or success in life” (Ng, Sarri, & Stoffregen, 2013).

Explanations for the intergenerational transmission of offending have included a lack of parental supervision, particularly in families where both parents were incarcerated, and on the stigmatizing effects that parental incarceration has on children (Ng, Sarri, & Stoffregen, 2013). Family instability and poverty, and the problematic conditions in which children of incarcerated parents are reared are also recognized as risk markers for youth's involvement in the justice system due to the high levels of homelessness, incomplete education, and exclusion from adequate housing, healthcare, and political participation that they experience (Ng, Sarri, & Stoffregen, 2013). To conceptualize the plight of children with incarcerated parents, researchers defined seven types of "social exclusions" experienced by prisoners and their families that capture the multiple pathways that link parental incarceration and adverse outcomes for children, including justice-involvement. Defined as "factors that lead to the children of incarcerated parents being excluded from or disadvantaged in the identified social domains", the "social exclusions" are often referenced in discussions involving the increased risk of justice-involvement among children with incarcerated parents (Ng, Sarri, & Stoffregen, 2013).

The first of these "social exclusions" asserts that prisoners and their families experience preexisting exclusion, and seem to have the most disadvantaged backgrounds prior to their imprisonment (Ng, Sarri, & Stoffregen, 2013). Such background deprivations are recognized as unemployment, low social class, multiple health problems, and marital conflict (Ng, Sarri, & Stoffregen, 2013). The second of these "social exclusions" is the loss of material and social capital that follows the circumstance of imprisonment (Ng, Sarri, & Stoffregen, 2013). Incarceration triggers "loss of income, additional costs associated with visiting and providing for the family member in prison, and difficulty securing employment post-incarceration due to the possession of a prison record" (Ng, Sarri, & Stoffregen, 2013). Stigma is recognized as the third

“social exclusion” experienced as a result of parental incarceration, and can be experienced in combination with preexisting disadvantages such as poor mental health, low social status, and poor academic performance (Ng, Sarri, & Stoffregen, 2013). The fourth exclusion, known as dynamic exclusion, “refers to more negative future experiences for children due to parental incarceration and the related exclusion and includes mental health problems, poor familial relationships, substance abuse, and children’s own delinquency and imprisonment” (Ng, Sarri, & Stoffregen, 2013).

The three remaining “social exclusions” faced by children of incarcerated parents are related to institutions. Linguistic exclusion relates to parents’ or children’s ineffective participation in court processing; political exclusion refers to ex-prisoners not having voting rights or other rights to participate in governmental decisions affecting their children; and administrative exclusion arises because children of incarcerated parents tend to be excluded by the state, particularly in the domain of official reports or national statistics, rendering them invisible to the general society (Ng, Sarri, & Stoffregen, 2013). Studies conducted using these “social exclusion” factors have found that the prevalence rate of the factors and parental incarceration are high amongst a sample of incarcerated youth, implying that the combined experiences increase the risk of justice-involvement for children with incarcerated parents (Ng, Sarri, & Stoffregen, 2013).

While the research published in existing literature diverges on the exact numerical probability of children with incarcerated parents committing criminal deviant acts, it is evident that the population of youth facing the circumstance of parental incarceration are at some elevated risk of their own justice-involvement. However, the imprisonment of a parent is often one faced by children in the presence of considerable other risk factors, including poverty,

exposure to violence, and family dysfunction. As a result, it becomes difficult to differentiate between these compounding negative experiences and assess blame of a child's life outcome to a single circumstance. Instead, it must be collectively acknowledged that children of incarcerated parents face multiple risk factors simultaneously that negatively hinder their development and life prospects. No single factor alone, such as parental incarceration, can be held fully responsible for a youth's eventual justice-involvement, but it can be acknowledged as a contributing circumstance that led to a specific outcome. In this sense, it should not be argued that a parent's imprisonment directly causes a child to become justice-involved, but rather that it is a factor that increases a youth's risk of justice-involvement, especially in the presence of other risk factors.

Part Two – Qualitative Interviews and Case Studies

I. Method

There is an inherent lack of personal representation in the existing literature regarding children of incarcerated parents – while research has noted the numerous ill effects they experience as a result of their parent's imprisonment, little has been published to exhibit the voices of these children. To corroborate or dispel the conclusions of previous research endeavors, this honors thesis project aimed to convey the story of adolescent children impacted by parental incarceration in their own words. Through the conduction of in-person qualitative interviews, a series of firsthand personal accounts were garnered that reflected the life journey of several impacted youths currently residing in the greater Hartford urban region.

The participants in the research study were members of the Hartford-based youth development nonprofit organization Our Piece of the Pie, which provides programs and services to assist at-risk urban youth with their transition to independent adulthood. Youth enrolled in the

program receive individual case management services, as well as educational and career development assistance and training and have access to an array of activities including tutoring, paid internship experiences, and financial assistance programs. The organization works with thousands of youth in the city of Hartford and surrounding region, and it is recognized as the city's premier provider of youth development services.

In addition to the structured qualitative interviews conducted with each participant, this research project involved an extensive case study component, as a longstanding relationship existed with each of the youth prior to their involvement in the research process. The length of these established relationships differed but was at least several months long, while some of the research participants in the study had been known for a period of multiple years. This background relationship was a positive foundation for the research interviews, as it created an atmosphere of comfort and familiarity for the youth to answer the questions honestly and openly. The youth were more likely to provide truthful responses given their security with the interviewer, and were less likely to withdraw in the fear of judgment or shame for their responses.

A series of carefully crafted research questions were constructed to guide the conversation with each participant in the research project. The questions were open-ended in design and nature, and offered the subjects an opportunity to elaborate on their responses in a level of depth that was of comfort to them. Questions centered on the youth's relationship with their parent prior to their incarceration, the period of their parent's incarceration and the effects they encountered as a result, and the outcome of the experience on their adolescent lives today. The questions regarding the current life outcomes of the youth were especially interested in revealing if the child had become justice-involved at any point during their adolescence, as a

great debate exists in the field concerning the increased risk of justice-involvement among the children of incarcerated parents.

All interviews for the research project were conducted at the Our Piece of the Pie main office located in the center of Hartford's North End neighborhood. This setting was chosen due to its familiarity for the research participants and its status as a place that is comfortable for them. The interviewees regularly attend programming at the Our Piece of the Pie office, and have a level of security in the space that puts them at ease. Interviews were conducted privately in the staff lounge, which is a locked room located away from the spaces used to house youth programming and services. The room offers several comfortable sitting arrangements, and has curtains to provide complete privacy for the research subjects. Due to its isolation, comfort, consistency, and familiarity, it was selected as an ideal location for the interviews to be conducted for the research project.

There were five participants in the research study – three males and two females. The participants were between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one, and they all had direct ties to the city of Hartford. The research subjects were all presently or formerly involved with the state of Connecticut Department of Children and Families agency, which indicated that their biological family had at some point been deemed neglectful, endangering, or unfit to care for them. The research participant's personal backgrounds reflected a broad range of experiences, which was expressed in the telling of their individual stories in the results of this research project. Participation in the case study and interview process was entirely voluntary by the individuals, and there were no incentives for their cooperation and effort.

This research project is limited in scope in that it represents only a small percentage of the overall affected population and cannot be used as a definitive embodiment of the effects of

parental incarceration on children and adolescents. However, it is still a substantive research endeavor due to its effectiveness in highlighting the common stories of disadvantaged youth in the city of Hartford who are frequently mislabeled and overlooked by the upper levels of society. Adolescents in the city of Hartford, especially the children of incarcerated parents, are not typically heard as an important voice in the overall landscape of the crippled city. But this population is ultimately the next generation of the city, and their oral histories and backgrounds must be understood in order to gain a fuller understanding of who exactly calls Hartford home. Furthermore, the conclusions drawn in this research study can be used to confirm or challenge the results analyzed in the pre-existing literature, and can serve as a foundation on which to continue study in several arenas of academic and scholarly interest.

II. Results

Ashley –

Ashley is an eighteen-year-old African American female, who is currently residing in the city of Hartford. She is committed to the state of Connecticut's Department of Children and Families as a participant in the Volunteer Services program for youth who have surpassed the age of legal majority. Her case with the state's child protective services agency stems from her former involvement in a prostitution and sex trafficking operation, in which she was paid as a minor to perform sexual acts for men. At the time of the interview, Ashley was placed in a therapeutic foster home located in Windsor, Connecticut. However, she was known to run away from the placement for several days or weeks at a time, stating that she was couch surfing with various friends across the city of Hartford during her absence. On the day of the interview (a Monday morning), Ashley arrived at the Our Piece of the Pie center carrying a backpack containing most of her belongings and begged staff for something to eat – "I have not been to

(my foster mother's house) since Tuesday. Can you please give me some food?" she repeatedly inquired. When Ashley was asked where she had been staying for the past few nights, she offered a noncommittal response that failed to identify a specific person or place. She stated that she was going to return to her foster home after the interview "to take a hot shower and eat a meal", although it is unknown if she followed through on these intentions.

Despite graduating from Windsor High School with a strong academic performance record in June of 2016, Ashley was not currently enrolled in a post-secondary or vocational education program. She had explored several sources of educational opportunity in the community with the support of her department worker, but ultimately opted not to pursue a program at this time. In January of 2017, she enrolled in a certified nursing assistant certification program through Asnuntuck Community College in nearby Enfield, but dropped out of the program on the first day. When confronted about this decision, Ashley asserted that she was emotionally unfit to manage the burdens of post-secondary education at this stage in her life, and that she intended to pursue a nursing degree eventually. For the immediate future, she focused her attention on locating full-time employment and reported that she had applied to several minimum wage jobs in the community. She recently attended a job interview at the Dunkin Donuts located on Main Street in Hartford, but has not yet received an offer of employment from the store. At the time of the interview, Ashley was participating in Our Piece of the Pie's career competency and development program, which afforded her an internship at the CVS Pharmacy on New Britain Avenue in West Hartford. This temporary opportunity allotted her one hundred twenty hours of work experience at a pay rate of \$10.10 per hour. Ashley reported that she was hopeful her consistently positive performance at her internship would eventually breed a regular employment opportunity for her at the store. Unfortunately, Ashley's fragile emotional and

mental health blocked the successful completion of her internship experience, and she stopped showing up for her assigned shifts after one week in the program.

In addition to her personal obligations and responsibilities, Ashley was also the young mother of a two-year-old son named Christopher. Christopher initially resided independently with Ashley in her therapeutic foster home, but was committed to the Department of Children and Families in November of 2016 as a result of parental neglect and endangerment. Today Christopher remains in the home with Ashley's foster mother, but is considered a child protective services ward of the state. In candid conversations, Ashley has admitted that she does not want to be a mother right now and that she lacks the motivation or desire to regain custody of her son. She references a longing to be young and carefree, and is not interested in assuming the burdens and responsibilities of motherhood at a young age. As a result of her actions and demeanor, Christopher's state social worker recently made the decision to shift the end goal of his permanency plan from maternal reunification to adoption. Recently, the toddler was placed in the care of a pre-adoptive foster home, and Ashley has been served paperwork from the department of child protective services agency requesting her consent to permanently sever her parental rights.

Ashley experienced the event of parental incarceration at the age of eight, when her father was sentenced to four years behind bars for his role in a crack cocaine operation and the commitment of a felony assault. Ashley stated that her father was arrested for the crimes because "someone snitched - which is a death sentence in the hood". At the time of her father's arrest, Ashley's parents shared collective custody of her, although she primarily resided with her mother. Ashley's father made regular child support payments to her mother and would occasionally visit her. She described her relationship with her father prior to his incarceration as

“shaky”, although she did not contribute blame for this inconsistency to her father directly.

Ashley recalls that her parents would often argue about domestic issues unrelated to her, such as infidelity and financial burden, and that her mother would resort to utilizing Ashley as a tool for leverage in her relationship with her father. According to Ashley,

“My parents never got along. They always argued about dumb shit. Like how many “hoes” my father had. It was like watching a cat and a dog fight each other. But when my mother got mad at him, she wouldn’t let him come see me anymore. And my father didn’t make me his top priority – he wouldn’t fight to come see me when my mother was being petty. It was stupid because they were so focused on hurting each other that they never realized they were hurting me in the process”.

The inability of Ashley’s parents to co-parent effectively also had an impact on the sustainability of her relationship with her father during the time that he was incarcerated. Ashley stated that her mother did not permit her to visit her father in prison and that she never asked her if she would like to see him. Ashley confided that she is unsure whether she would have accepted the invitation to visit her father had it been presented to her, and stated that she thought “that would have been a sad way to see him”. Despite the lack of in-person contact, Ashley maintained a standard level of contact with her father via telecommunication. She recalls speaking to him on the phone approximately three times per week, although the calls were often brief – a few minutes at the most. Despite lacking a depth of conversation, Ashley appreciated the opportunity to hear her father’s voice regularly, stating “that was as close as I was going to get to him”.

When asked about the differences she observed internally or externally in the wake of her father’s incarceration, Ashley conveyed that her childhood absent the consistent presence of her father was “lonely and incomplete”. She reflected on the substantial periods of time that her father missed out on, and admitted that she wished he had been there for her more, even for traditional events that she viewed as trivial and unimportant, such as parent-teacher conferences

and family cookouts. Ashley stated that her father's absence caused her to "look for love in the wrong places" as she grew older in order to consume a void that he had left behind and that it impacted her ability to identify and maintain the presence of healthy, positive relationships.

According to Ashley,

"My dad was gone. I wanted to feel loved. But nobody taught me how a man is supposed to treat a woman. I only knew what I saw from my mom – how her boyfriends treated her. And that wasn't good. But I wanted to feel like someone loved me, so I did things that I didn't want to do. I looked for love where it could never exist. And I picked the really wrong guys".

In addressing these comments, Ashley began to reference her eventual involvement in prostitution and sex trafficking activities in connection with the incarceration of her father. While she did not elaborate on the circumstances extensively, she admitted that the decisions she made to sell her body for sexual activities were influenced by the experience of her parent's incarceration, and that this event contributed in part to situations that she endured throughout her adolescence. Despite acknowledging the immense harm that her father inflicted due to his imprisonment, Ashley did confirm that she felt positively towards him and that she felt as though they would have been able to rekindle their relationship had he not passed away when she was fifteen-years-old. As Ashley stated,

"I think we could've put it all behind us. We could've moved on and just focused on the future. I would've forgiven him. I just wanted my father back. There was no point in holding it over his head. He had already missed out on enough".

Despite identifying as the child of an incarcerated parent, Ashley has had no involvement with the juvenile or criminal justice system to this point in her life, and she has not been arrested for committing a crime. She admits to engaging in illegal activities regularly, such as stealing clothing and other material goods from consumer stores and regularly smoking marijuana, but she has never been caught committing these acts by law enforcement. Ashley adamantly asserts

that she does not want to end up in prison like her father, and states that she wants to “clean up her life” so that she can escape the streets of Hartford and have a better life. When asked how she envisioned herself accomplishing this goal, Ashley discussed her desire to graduate from college and become a nurse so that she would be qualified to serve as a positive role model for the younger people in her family. As Ashley stated,

“I believe that I can still be successful even though my father went to prison. I just need to figure my life out – get my shit together. I need to be more mature and work harder. I need to work on myself and get out of the streets. If I don’t get out of the streets soon, I’ll never make it. It’s time to make the right decisions. I don’t want to end up like my father. Prison is not a place for me”.

Despite Ashley’s proclamation that she desired to turn her life around, the achievement of such a goal was made far more difficult several weeks after her formal interview. Due to repeated noncompliance with the orders of the Department of Children and Families adolescent program, Ashley was delivered an order from her state social worker that stated she would be released from the care of the agency effective immediately. As a result, Ashley lost access to all department services, including her housing arrangement and monthly financial living stipend. Several weeks later, Ashley confided that she recently learned she was pregnant with her second child. As Ashley stated,

“I’m really [expletive] now. I don’t know what I’m going to do. I slept outside last night. My boyfriend and I aren’t getting along. He said I should get an abortion. I want [the Department of Children and Families] to take me back. But I [expletive] up too many times. Do you know how scary it is to be out here all alone? What’s going to happen to me? My life is so messed up. I [expletive] up. I just want to be a kid again. [Expletive] was so much easier back then”.

Treyquan –

Treyquan is an eighteen-year-old African American male, who is currently residing in Windsor, Connecticut, although he has numerous ties directly to the city of Hartford through his

extended kinship network. He is committed to the state of Connecticut's Department of Children and Families division, and was recently transferred from the out of home child protective services program to the volunteer services program after turning the legal age of majority in February. He has been residing in the same foster home for the past several years, although he has new aspirations of transitioning into an independent living program with the department now that he is eighteen. This transitional program seeks to prepare adolescent youth to exit the department's services and survive as economically independent young adults by gradually removing the financial assistance the department provides over a two-year period. The state initially covers the youth's full living expenses by providing rent and a monthly living stipend for the first year of the program, before slowly decreasing their monthly payments in the final phases of the program. The goal is for the adolescent to be stable enough to fully transition to independent adulthood at this time, at which point the department removes all financial support services. Treyquan's state social worker has discussed his case with him in recent months and indicated that she would consider advocating for him to be placed in the independent living program when she felt as though he was ready.

Treyquan earned his high school diploma in January of 2017 from the Woodland School, which is a division of the East Hartford Public High School system that services students with severe behavioral needs. He enrolled at the Woodland School after sustaining several disciplinary actions in a neighboring school district that led to his eventual expulsion. Treyquan's educational record consists of numerous school changes on the grounds of disciplinary infractions, and he admitted that he has often struggled to stay out of trouble while in a school environment. Despite his disruptive behavior, he performed at a standard level in the classroom, receiving average marks, but never placing himself in danger of failing to be promoted to the

next grade level. At the time of his interview, Treyquan had recently begun a post-secondary vocational certification course in culinary arts and food services at Capital Community College in downtown Hartford. Treyquan reported that the course met three evenings per week and that he was scheduled to successfully complete the course requirements in June of this year.

In addition to his pursuit of a vocational certification through the local community college, Treyquan held a steady part-time job at a Subway sandwich shop in nearby Windsor, Connecticut. He reported that he regularly worked a minimum of twenty hours per week at the store, and viewed his position as a positive career experience due to his interest in the field of culinary arts. Despite enjoying his job at the moment, Treyquan mentioned that it was strenuous work to earn only a meager minimum wage hourly paycheck, and acknowledged that the job was not a sustainable source of employment. According to Treyquan, "I can't survive on my own working at Subway. I don't get paid enough and I would be miserable if that was my job forever".

On top of his substantial commitment to his educational and employment endeavors, Treyquan also indicated that he maintained a strong presence in the spiritual and religious community that he identified with, and that he was heavily involved in his local church. He attends a religious service every Sunday, and is also an active member of the church's gospel choir. Treyquan discussed his relationship with God as a stable force in his life that he has consistently leaned on for personal growth and spiritual guidance, and also asserted that the church offered him an extended kinship network with which he strongly identifies. It was evident via his demeanor during the discussion that religion played an integral role in Treyquan's life, and that it constituted a major component of the identity that he has found for himself as a burgeoning young man. Additionally, it offered him the ability to access a constant support

network of trusted adults, which was important for his continued positive development given the circumstances of his trying childhood.

Treyquan's story was distinctive in comparison to the majority subject population because he had experienced the incarceration of both his mother and his father during his childhood. Treyquan's mother was sentenced to two years in prison when he was a toddler for the possession of a controlled substance, while his father was sentenced to six years in prison when he was seven-years-old for domestic violence. Treyquan stated that while this was the period of incarceration that he recalls the most vividly, his father was routinely in and out of jail throughout his childhood, and that it was not unusual to hear of his arrest. Treyquan reported that he was residing with his mother at the time of her arrest, and that custody was granted to his grandmother during her incarceration. Due to his young age at the time of this event, Treyquan does not recollect much of the circumstance, and does not believe that his mother's incarceration has had a major effect on his life. At the time of his father's arrest, Treyquan was reunited with and living with his mother, while his father resided outside of the home with his wife.

When asked to describe his relationship with each of his parent's prior to their incarceration, Treyquan was rather indifferent when reflecting on the bond that he had with his mother. He stated that he was too young to personally remember the significance of their parent-child relationship, but assumes that it was adequate. However, he had a vastly different viewpoint of his father at the time of his arrest. According to Treyquan,

"I didn't really see my father much. He was kind of like a hoe. He was always seeing other women and that upset my mother. He wasn't committed to my mother or our family. So eventually she didn't want him around anymore. I didn't really want to see my father anyways. He was kind of a stranger".

Despite their unstable relationship, Treyquan reported that he maintained regular contact with his father while he was incarcerated, just as he did with his mother during her time behind bars during his earlier years. While he did not know the exact geographic location of the prison that housed either of his parents, he remembered that it was close enough to his home that he could personally visit them. Treyquan believed that he visited his mother in prison approximately one time per week and that he visited his father in prison approximately one time per month. He stated that his grandmother transported him to see his mother in prison, while his mother brought him to visit his father in prison. He credits the strong support of these individuals under the exasperating circumstances for the continuance of his relationship with his parents while they were incarcerated, and admitted that he was eternally grateful for their persistent efforts. In addition to the in-person visitation, Treyquan spoke with his mother and father from prison on the phone approximately one time per week, but did not prefer this method of communication. According to Treyquan,

“It’s hard to be a little kid and have to rely on a phone call to connect with your parent. You don’t really know how to have a conversation like that at that age. For me, I needed to see them to feel like they were there. Speaking on the phone just didn’t feel right. There was always an awkward silence. There’s really no way to tell someone about your life when they’re missing it because they’re locked up. I would only say a few words – that was enough for me”.

Treyquan ultimately stated that he felt only minimal effects during his mother’s incarceration. He credits this relative indifference to the grandmother who cared for him during his mother’s imprisonment, and recalled that she made a considerable effort to constantly remind him of his mother. Treyquan stated that his mother was never forgotten during the time that she was away, and that his grandmother took care of him in a manner that reflected his mother’s wishes. Treyquan also asserted that he did not notice a considerable difference in his life when

his father was later incarcerated, as he had already failed to serve as an active presence in his life prior to his arrest. As Treyquan stated,

“It didn’t feel much different when my father went to prison. He was already not around much. The only difference was now he couldn’t be around even if he wanted to. Before he wasn’t around by his choice. It wasn’t his choice anymore”.

Despite the obvious tension in his direct feelings towards his father, Treyquan admitted that his father’s absence impacted him negatively. He noted the lack of a positive male role model in his life, and reflected that his inability to mature into a man stemmed from the absence of his father during his childhood. He reported that nobody advised him how to take care of himself as a result, and admitted that his chronic immaturity originated from his inability to connect with a male role model during his childhood. Treyquan also reflected deeply on the young man that he was today and noted several character traits that he attributed to his father’s negative lifestyle. According to Treyquan,

“My father had a lot of anger. I think I got that from him. I go from zero to one-hundred very quickly. The littlest things can set me off. My father was also very aggressive and was quick to fight. I got that from him too. I react without thinking – I have violent tendencies. My father taught me that it was acceptable to abuse people”.

In reflecting on the impact that his mother’s incarceration has had on his life, Treyquan drew several intriguing connections between the circumstances of their historical relationship and the outcome on his adolescent life. Some of these connections were physical in nature – such as the assertion that his mother’s unhealthy lifestyle and obesity had transcended to his current lifestyle. He also stated that his mother now identifies as gay and has a romantic interest in women, which he believes impacted his level of comfort with his own sexuality. Treyquan confirmed that he also categorizes himself as a gay man and takes a romantic interest in men,

which he stated is a daunting identity to exhibit as a black teenager. Yet he believes that his mother's sexual promiscuity and comfort opened the door for him to explore his sexual preferences as a young man. Treyquan also related his fragile emotional and mental health to his mother's history of mental and emotional illness, and stated that he believed he inherited these traits from her as well. Treyquan reported that he had recently received notification that he was deemed to be clinically bipolar, and stated that his mother suffered from the disorder as well. He recalled that he was once told mental health disorders were genetically determined and that it was due to his biological identity that he presently suffered from a mental health condition.

When presented with the task of contemplating the role that the incarceration of his parents had played on his adolescent life, Treyquan affirmed that it was damaging, yet not all encompassing. He stated that the personal issues and negative outcomes he experienced throughout his childhood are linked to the event of parental incarceration, but that the imprisonment of his parents is not solely to blame for the conclusions that have been drawn. Treyquan asserted that multiple other factors played a role, including the people that he was surrounded by throughout his childhood and the environments that his mother exposed him to. According to Treyquan,

“There wasn't a lot of positivity. It's Hartford – there's not much good going on in these streets. And that's what I grew up surrounded by – someone was always doing something they weren't supposed to do. I was exposed to a lot of bad things at a young age”.

Exposure to these negative environments, in combination with a host of other risk factors and the incarceration of his mother and father, has likely played a featuring role in Treyquan's own behavioral and discipline issues. When asked about his inability to stay out of trouble, Treyquan responded that

“My mother never really beat us. And my father wasn’t around so we had no structure. I got used to doing whatever I wanted, and at first there was no consequences. I didn’t care. Nobody was around to teach me right from wrong. It was all the same to me”. In addition to his numerous school expulsions, Treyquan had been arrested one time as a juvenile offender, and spent twenty-four hours in a juvenile detention facility as a result. The case was eventually dismissed, and Treyquan stated that he has not been arrested or involved in a law enforcement case since. Treyquan blamed his parent’s incarceration for his involvement in the juvenile-justice system, and asserted that “we learn from our parents – we see them doing bad things and we assume it is okay to do them too”. While Treyquan had escaped the reigns of the juvenile justice system relatively unharmed, his twin brother was not as fortunate - Treyquan reported that he was currently incarcerated in an adult jail facing an array of violent criminal charges, including first-degree murder.

Despite his trying childhood and juvenile-justice involvement, Treyquan remained positive that his future would end in a different direction than that of his parents. He aligned several clear goals for himself in the upcoming years, and declared that he would like to move into his own apartment by the end of this year, and that he would like to purchase a car by the time he turns twenty-years-old. Treyquan aspired to eventually earn a four-year bachelors’ degree in criminal justice and business administration and hold a full-time job that offered a him comfortable salary. When discussing his life chances, Treyquan said,

“I believe in myself. But my parent’s incarceration has impacted my life chances. The statistics tell me that I am going to fail because they failed. If they can’t make it, neither can I. Society already expects me not to make it. And that’s a hard reality. I have no support out here because everyone expects the worst from me because of who my parents are”.

Despite these negative feelings, Treyquan insisted that he had internalized the incarceration of his mother and father as a positive motivator for himself as he grew older. He considered that he did not want to end up in prison like his parents, and that he was determined to make better

choices than the people he was surrounded by during his childhood. He stated that he knew what not to do and had the clarity to go about things differently. As he ended, Treyquan declared that “prison was not a place you would ever find him – the good Lord knows that”.

Today, neither of Treyquan’s parents hold legal custody over him, and he remains a ward of the state of Connecticut. He reports seeing his mother occasionally, either in church or on his own accord, and speaking to her on a consistent basis. However, Treyquan stated that his father is no longer in his life in any capacity. According to Treyquan,

“My father contacted my social worker several times about seeing me. But I always declined. He’s missed too much. He went to prison and missed even more. There would be too much to talk about at this point – how do you catch someone up on years of your life? I want to save myself the trouble. I don’t even want to try. I have better things to be doing”.

Donnell –

Donnell is a seventeen-year-old biracial male of African-American and Caucasian descent. Originally from the city of Hartford, Donnell is currently residing in a therapeutic group home for adolescent males located in Windsor, Connecticut. Donnell’s biological mother remains his legal guardian in the court of law, but she is not presently considered his custodial parent. Citing his explosive behavioral challenges and severe mental health needs, Donnell’s mother voluntarily subjected him to temporary residence in a therapeutic group home several months ago and does not intend to seek full custody of him prior to him reaching the age of legal maturity on his eighteenth birthday. As a result of this decision, Donnell is now involved with the Connecticut Department of Children and Families, although he is not bindingly committed to the system through the child protective services unit. He is followed regularly by a state social worker and accesses the department’s comprehensive resources and supports, but is not considered a ward of the state at this time.

Donnell is presently enrolled in the eleventh grade at the Joshua Center in Enfield, which is a clinical day school for children with psychiatric and substance abuse disorders who require care and services less severe than those provided in an in-patient setting. The school is operated as a division of Natchaug Hospital and offers intensive treatment programs for adolescents in a small setting that combines educational services with clinical therapy and rehabilitation. Donnell was enrolled in a traditional education program prior to his commitment to the Joshua Center, but was deemed unsuccessful due to his mental health challenges. He has excelled academically since beginning with the clinical education program, and primarily earned A's and B's in the most recent marking period. Donnell is on track to be promoted to the senior class next year and will earn his high school diploma in the spring of 2018.

While Donnell is currently unemployed, he is working with staff in the career services division at Our Piece of the Pie to cultivate and develop the career readiness and job skills that he will need to locate part-time employment in the community. In January, he began the Youth Business program at Our Piece of the Pie, which met two afternoons per week for approximately two hours. This ten-week program serves as an inclusive introduction to employment preparation, and teaches adolescents the foundations and principles of locating, securing, and maintaining a job in the community. The program is the first component of the organization's career preparation, and is generally offered to and attended by high school aged students. Youth who are deemed successful in the Youth Business program progress to the internship phase of the program, which opens the door for additional job placement and career opportunities.

Donnell is presently attempting to pass the Youth Business curriculum for the second time, as he did not successfully complete the program during the first ten-week cycle that he participated in. Staff faced tremendous behavioral difficulties with Donnell in the first half of the

program, and noted that his attitude greatly hindered his ability to be successful. He was consistently disrespectful and combative with staff, and refused to complete the tasks that were asked of him throughout the program. Eventually his attendance began to taper off as well, and the youth was discharged from the Youth Business program at the halfway mark. Despite his initial failure, Donnell has displayed tremendous levels of progress in his re-attempt of the program and is on-track to progress to an internship in June. Staff have reported a positive change in his confrontational and combative attitude, and observed that the youth is less disrespectful and more engaged in the program. Donnell remains a demanding case to maintain from a case management perspective due to his severe behavioral and mental health needs, but has exhibited signs of gradual progress since his enrollment at Our Piece of the Pie.

Donnell's biological father has been incarcerated periodically throughout his life. While his confinement has not been constant, Donnell reported that it felt as though his father was always incarcerated due to his frequent arrests and limited freedom between sentences. Donnell's father is currently serving a short sentence on a weapon charge at a prison in nearby Enfield, and is slated to be released in June of this year. Despite his upcoming release, Donnell was adamant that he would not pursue a renewed connection with his absent father. According to Donnell,

“There's nothing good about my relationship with my father. There never has been. I don't like him. I don't even talk to him. I don't even know why I don't like him. I just don't for some reason”.

Donnell confirmed that his father has never played an active role in his life and that he does not acknowledge a relationship with him. He reported that he has always resided with his mother, and that his father has never provided financial support in the form of mandated child support payments. When asked if his father's lifelong absence hurts him, Donnell asserted “no because I don't [expletive] like him”.

Donnell has voluntarily chosen not to maintain contact with his father in the years that he has been incarcerated. He reported that he does not communicate with him through any means and stated that he has never visited his father in prison. Donnell asserted that this lack of contact was what he preferred, and bluntly admitted that he “didn’t want to talk to [his father] about [expletive]”. Donnell further commented that he does not discuss his father’s incarceration with anyone but his girlfriend, and that he is predominantly unbothered by the circumstances of his father’s absence in his life. He contributes no negative effects on his adolescent life to his father’s numerous prison sentences, and even asserted that his life was actually better as a result of his father’s incarceration. According to Donnell,

“Nothing is different about my life when my father is in prison. I don’t see him when he’s out, and I don’t see him when he’s in. I think my life is actually better when my father is away. When he’s in prison I don’t have to worry about that [expletive]. At least when he’s in jail I know he’s safe. He’s going to get himself killed out here on the streets. I don’t care about him but I don’t want him dead either”.

Donnell remained adamant about the irrelevancy of his father’s incarceration on his own life when pressed to elaborate on the negativity that it has fostered in his adolescence. Donnell claims that the incarceration of his father has not impacted him in any way and that it does not bother him that his father has been overwhelmingly absent from his life. He attributes no negative consequences to his father’s imprisonment and firmly believes that the circumstance constitutes an irrelevant component of his adolescent identity. Furthermore, Donnell claimed that he has strayed from conflict and refrained from getting into trouble in school and in the community, and reported that he has never been involved with the juvenile-justice system – but case management records indicate that this assertion is not true. Donnell has in fact committed several juvenile offenses, which has largely contributed to his present residential placement in a therapeutic group home. He has also faced severe disciplinary measures at various schools and

been removed from mainstream education programs due to his behavioral challenges. While these acts cannot be credited directly to the incarceration of his father, it is likely that Donnell internalizes the complex negative effects of his parent's imprisonment, which has caused him to act out externally in troubling ways that have led to his history of justice-involvement.

In closing, Donnell reflected on the direction of his life in a positive manner, and did not foresee the presence of negative outcomes in his life due to the incarceration of his father. Donnell discussed his desire to attend college in the coming years and an itch to secure housing independently, and stated that his outlook for the next five years of his life was "great". He reported that his father's incarceration had no impact on his life chances because he "did not care about [his father]" and that it has not been a struggle to overcome his father's absence.

According to Donnell,

"It is what it is. I don't care about my father. It hasn't impacted me because I don't let it. I don't even think about him being in prison. I really don't care. When he comes home I'm not going to see him. He's not my problem. I don't care if I ever see him again in my life".

Yasmine –

Yasmine is a twenty-one-year-old female of biracial African-American and Egyptian descent, who is currently residing in the city of New Britain. She has been a member of the Our Piece of the Pie organization since she was sixteen years old after being committed to the program via the recommendation of her state social worker. Yasmine's life history is bewilderingly turbulent, beginning with her commitment to the Department of Children and Families as an infant. She remained in the custody of the state of Connecticut through her eighteenth birthday, and was given a fair opportunity to successfully participate in the department's adolescent voluntary services program. Unfortunately, Yasmine repeatedly struggled to uphold the contractual agreement outlined in the voluntary services program, and

was eventually served an 800 order by her social worker. This order, used to sever ties between the department and noncompliant youth who have legally aged out of the state's mandated services, was issued to Yasmine as a result of her inability to fulfill the requirements expected of her in the voluntary services program.

Yasmine has struggled immensely since being kicked out of the Department of Children and Families independent adolescent program several years ago. She has battled numerous bouts of homelessness, and has been couch surfing in the city of Hartford and surrounding communities for the last eighteen months. She no longer has consistent access to healthy and sustainable food sources, and has lost a considerable amount of weight in the past year. With the exception of a short stint as an associate at the local Walmart superstore that ended with her termination for inconsistent attendance, she has been perpetually unemployed and unable to locate steady employment. Yasmine has also admittedly suffered from substance abuse disorders in recent years, and contracted a sexually transmitted infection during a period that she was being paid to engage in sexual activities with men and other women simultaneously.

While she has not enrolled in any post-secondary education programs to date, Yasmine holds a high school diploma from the Raymond Hill alternative school in New Britain. Despite her significant behavioral and mental health challenges, Yasmine is an intelligent individual with the ability to be successful when she focuses on the task at hand. She expresses an interest in eventually pursuing a college degree and says that she feels as though she could be prosperous academically if she commits herself to the post-secondary process. However, she believes that now is not the time to initiate this process, and bluntly admitted that she "needed to get her life in order first".

Yasmine became a parent in December of 2016, when she gave birth to a healthy baby girl. The father of the child is Yasmine's current boyfriend, who is an unemployed convicted felon with a known gang affiliation. Yasmine describes her boyfriend as a "street king" and admits that they collectively survive off of his illegitimate earnings. The boyfriend has previously fathered a child with another woman, but admits that he does not provide physical or financial care for that child. Regrettably, Yasmine's child was removed from her custody shortly after birth and placed in the state's foster care system. Yasmine and the child's father are permitted weekly supervised visitation opportunities at the Department of Children and Families main office in Hartford, but have temporarily lost their parental rights. At this time, the permanency plan for her daughter is reunification with her biological parents, but Yasmine must make significant progress in securing the stability of her life before the department can execute this placement. Yasmine states that she is wholly committed to reunifying with her child, and that she is willing to do whatever it takes to achieve this primary goal.

Yasmine experienced the event of parental incarceration as an infant, when her mother was arrested for kidnapping her older sister, who was in the custody of child protective services. Because she did not have parental rights to the child, Yasmine's mother was charged with and convicted of a criminal act, resulting in her imprisonment. As an infant at the time of the conviction, Yasmine does not recall the specifics of the situation or what happened to her during the subsequent years that her mother was behind bars. However, she is aware that her mother's arrest is what led to her initial involvement with child protective services. Yasmine stated that she cannot comment on the relationship that she had with her mother prior to her arrest due to her young age at the time of the incident, but that she does not believe her mother was a "good mother". Yasmine stated,

“I can’t prove it but my mother probably wasn’t doing a good job taking care of me at the time. She didn’t take care of my sister – that’s why she was in DCF in the first place. So if she couldn’t take care of her, I don’t know who the hell thought she was going to take care of me. I’m not surprised I ended up in DCF. Look at her track record”.

Because Yasmine was not placed in the care of immediate or extended relatives upon the termination of her mother’s parental rights, no parent-child contact was maintained during the period of her mother’s incarceration. Merely an infant at the time, communication via oral or written means was impossible and the department of child services does not support prison visitation for children removed from their incarcerated parent’s legal and physical custody. As a result, the incarceration of Yasmine’s mother acted effectively as a permanent severance of their relationship. Forbidden from establishing contact with her mother, Yasmine was eventually adopted but remained intertwined with the Department of Children and Families throughout her childhood and adolescence.

Despite the absence of a parent-child relationship with her biological mother, Yasmine attributes several negative consequences of her current life standing to the incarceration of her parent and resulting childrearing in the department of child protective services. The biggest of these negative effects is her mental health. According to Yasmine,

“I’m crazy as hell. I be thinking things nobody else thinks. I know I’m crazy and my medication doesn’t help me much. But from talking to my mother as I got older, I know I got it from her. That [expletive] is crazy. She’s crazier than me”.

Yasmine reported that she currently suffered from several mental health disorders, including bipolar disorder and depression. She stated that she is prescribed medication for these diagnoses, but often fails to take them as suggested. Yasmine also stated that she occasionally wonders if she suffers from schizophrenia. She stated that she receives services from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services for these mental health challenges, but has not found them

to be effective in combating many of the disadvantages that she is currently grappling with. As Yasmine stated,

“DMHAS doesn’t really work for me. They just don’t get it. I know I’m [expletive] up. I’ll go to their therapy and all that. But those people don’t understand what it’s like to be me. Nobody knows what it’s like to be me. I’m the only one who understands me. People telling me about myself doesn’t do nothing for me”.

In addition to battling severe mental health concerns, Yasmine has also dealt with several legal issues during her adolescence that have led to her involvement with the juvenile-justice system. While she cannot recall the exact number of cases that she was involved in during her teenage years, Yasmine estimates that she was arrested four or five times as a juvenile on charges ranging from aggravated assault to disorderly conduct and threatening a police officer. This justice involvement stirred great disruption in her life, and caused her to be committed to several group home living arrangements as an adolescent. Yasmine recalls that she spent most of her teenage years on juvenile probation and that she was frequently in trouble for violating the terms of her sentence. She stated that while she cannot contribute her juvenile-justice involvement to her mother’s incarceration directly, she believes that it is yet another consequence of her overall life history. As Yasmine stated,

“Look, I’ve been through a lot of [expletive]. More than most kids. My mom got locked up and they took me away. I was only a baby and I was being bounced around all of these places. Nothing was ever stable in my life. I was also surrounded by negative situations. Obviously that didn’t help me. It [expletive] me up. If my life was stable these things probably wouldn’t be happening to me. I feel like I never really had a chance”.

Despite the numerous obstacles standing in her direct path, Yasmine maintained a positive outlook on her life chances at the conclusion of her interview. When she considered her future, Yasmine envisioned herself reunited with her daughter and confided that she could not

wait to “hug and kiss her again”. Yasmine also hoped to reside in her own apartment and have a stable job so that she could provide for her family. She asserted that she simply wanted to have a better life than the one that she had always known, and that she wanted to be able to give her daughter “the world”. A clear fondness developed in Yasmine’s tone and demeanor as she discussed the birth of her own child, and it was evident that she had a genuine desire to improve for the sake of the child. As far as her current relationship with her own mother, Yasmine felt as though it was permanently broken beyond repair. As Yasmine concluded her interview she confessed

“I hate my mother so much. I hate that [expletive] so bad. She made my life a living hell. I didn’t know it was possible to have as much hatred towards someone as I do towards her. She’s a thot (whore). All she does is suck dick out here. And then she has the nerve to talk about me like I’m a hoe ass child. Like who the [expletive] do you think you’re talking to? I didn’t know we talked to each other like that. Then she wants to get mad at me when I’m disrespectful towards her. Yeah okay. Whatever [expletive]”.

Mickey –

Mickey is a seventeen-year-old male of Puerto Rican descent, who is currently residing with his mother and her boyfriend in a neighborhood in the South End of Hartford. Mickey was referred to services at the Our Piece of the Pie agency via his juvenile probation officer, and is currently enrolled as a member of the organization’s court supported services division. Mickey’s childhood and adolescence have been characterized by mass dysfunction, which has led to his family’s continued involvement with the Department of Children and Families. While he is not legally committed to the department’s child protective services system, Mickey is agency involved and receives case management services and supports from the state’s adolescent department. Despite remaining in the legal custody of his biological mother, Mickey describes his home environment as callously chaotic, and reports that his mother’s boyfriend is

emotionally, mentally, and physically abusive. Mickey alleges that his mother is an incompetent parent incapable of caring for her children, and openly asserts his bottomless dislike for her. Both his mother and her boyfriend are currently unemployed and surviving economically on state cash assistance funds.

The instability of Mickey's residential environment has caused great disruption and conflict throughout his adolescence. Both Mickey's mother and her boyfriend suffer from bipolar disorder, which creates high levels of behavioral fluctuation and outburst in the home. Mickey also suffers from behavioral and mental health challenges himself, and admits to being noncompliant with his prescribed therapy and medication program. Mickey has been hospitalized for a mental health episode numerous times in the past calendar year, and most recently spent several weeks in inpatient care at the Institute of Living in February. Mickey's hospitalizations are typically ordered at the request of his mother, who will call the police and report that she "cannot control her child and fears for her personal safety". Mickey frequently lands in physical altercations with her mother's boyfriend, and has also been accused of stealing money from his mother's state cash assistance check on several occasions – claims which he adamantly denies. Frustrated by the instability of the home, Mickey frequently runs away from the residence and finds temporary shelter on a friend's couch, returning home only when he runs out of places to stay.

Mickey is currently enrolled in the eleventh grade at the Northwest Village School, which is a behavioral program operated by the Wheeler Clinic for adolescent students facing severe behavioral, emotional, and mental health deficits. Despite his active standing, Mickey regularly skips school and is currently failing all of his classes. He has fallen behind in his eleventh grade coursework, and will likely require summer schooling or credit recovery to remain on pace for

graduation. Mickey has also been involved in several disciplinary infractions at the school that have resulted in multiple suspension spells, and reports that he is frequently causing conflict while in class. As Mickey states,

“I get bored at school. I don’t like learning. And when I get bored I start [expletive] just because I’m bored. Most of it starts over girls. I’ll go after a [expletive’s] girl just to start [expletive]. I get a rush from fighting”.

In addition to the obstacles presented by his behavioral and mental health needs, Mickey is a self-admitted abuser of various substances. He confesses to regularly smoking marijuana to cope with his anxiety and recurrent mood swings, and states that he also drinks alcohol in social settings. Mickey further acknowledges his apt for experimentation with other illegal substances, and admits that he will “try just about anything if his friends are doing it too”.

Mickey’s consistent patterns of erratic, unpredictable, and volatile behavior in the home and at school are often mirrored in his participation in programs and services at Our Piece of the Pie. Likely correlated to the present condition of his mental health, Mickey’s behavior swings immensely on a regular basis, and it can be challenging for him to participate in the group setting of the program. Mickey has conflictingly participated in the Youth Business program for the past year, and is currently attempting to pass it for the fifth time. He inconsistently attends the program, and has dropped out of several cycles at the midway point. When he does attend, Mickey’s behavior can be exasperatingly disruptive to the staff and program participants, and it is often an utterly trying task to help him maintain his composure in the session. Mickey has an urgent desire to seek attention from his peers in social settings, which serves as the root of the majority of his behavioral issues in the program. Last year, Mickey was attacked by a group of young men in the building’s elevator, after he “ran his mouth too much” during a program

outing. Mickey was rushed to the hospital via ambulance after the attack, and received numerous stitches to close several deep facial wounds.

Mickey's involvement in the research study stemmed from the incarceration of his biological father. Despite the chromosome connection, Mickey seemingly had the most underdeveloped relationship with his incarcerated parent in the study, and even went as far as routinely referring to the man only as his "sperm donor". Mickey reported that his father had been absent from his life since birth, and that he had no innate desire to establish a relationship of any variety with him at this time. According to Mickey,

"I don't give a [expletive] about that man. That [expletive] is my sperm donor. He ain't done [expletive] for me – never has, never will. He's never been there. It's always been my mom and whatever bum ass [expletive] she's messing with at the time. But my sperm donor never been there. He ain't [expletive]"

Mickey repeatedly deflected questions regarding his father's incarceration during the interview process, and stated that he did not know the circumstances of the situation or his present whereabouts. He was adamant that all ties to his biological father had been permanently severed, and insisted that he was unbothered by the lack of a paternal relationship in his life. He attributed no negative effects on his life to the absence of his father, and believed that the dysfunction of his family unit in its entirety was more at fault than his distant father. According to Mickey,

"I'm not going to blame my father for anything. He isn't even here. How can I say it's his fault that I'm so [expletive] up? What about the people who did raise me? Those people did some [expletive]. I didn't just turn out like this. Someone [expletive] me up". Mickey was adamant that he had no desire to reconnect with his biological father as he grew older, and professed that he did not think about him at all. Whenever he was posed with a question that dug at the root of this sentiment during the interview, Mickey would merely reply that he "didn't know because he didn't know that [expletive]"

Of all the participants in the research study, Mickey had by far the longest juvenile justice record and was currently serving an active juvenile probation sentence at the time of the interview. He had been confined in juvenile detention centers on multiple occasions and was a well known subject to the local police. Mickey has been involved in numerous criminal matters and has cases on his juvenile record for marijuana possession, fighting, theft, automobile theft, and weapon possession. Mickey admitted to having gang affiliations in the city of Hartford and proclaimed a pure love for the streets. As Mickey stated,

“I can’t stay out of the streets. I love the fast life – everything about it. It’s quick money. It’s worth the risk. I know it’s dangerous – but I don’t give a [expletive]. You’re a hero if you die out here. Sometimes I think about getting out of this life. But I don’t think that’s possible. Once you’re in – you’re in. I’m here now. This is my life. And it doesn’t hurt that it gets the girls. Hoes love this [expletive]. Don’t no female want a punk ass [expletive]. They love the bad boys. I got all the hoes”.

A year away from his eighteenth birthday, Mickey appeared to have no desire to stay out of legal trouble as he approached the age of maturity. He adamantly proclaimed that he was not afraid to land in the “big boy jail” and believed that the act of being incarcerated earned respect in the streets. In his eyes, being incarcerated was somewhat of an honor – it was something he felt as though he needed to accomplish in order to move up in the ranks of his gang. According to Mickey, prison was an ordeal he had to survive in order to accomplish his ultimate goals.

Unfortunately, Mickey admitted that the outlook for his future was bleak – but he was steadfast that his negative life outcome was not connected to the incarceration of his father. Instead, he proclaimed that his life chances and outcome were a consequence of himself. Mickey stated that he was to blame for the mess that he had created of his life, and did not want to associate himself with his biological father in any way. When asked to reflect on the future of his life, Mickey stated,

“In ten years...I’ll probably be locked up or dead. That’s really how I see it right now. That’s where the path I’m on leads. I don’t think I can turn it around. It’s dangerous for me to drop out now. I’m in too deep. Even if I walk away, they’ll kill me. Those are my brothers – they got my back. I can’t walk away from them. But they got me trapped now”.

Part Three – Discussion

In summary, the interviews conducted with the research subjects largely corroborated the claims disclosed in the existing literature on the effects of parental incarceration on adolescents and children. All of the interviewees in the case observation study, whether they recognized the extent to which it had done so, had suffered negative consequences and effects during the childrearing and childhood process that had translated into diminished life outcomes and probabilities in adolescence as a result of their parent’s incarceration. It is impossible to pinpoint a singular source of these outcomes on a particular event such as the incarceration of a parent, but a strong argument can be made that parental incarceration is a circumstance that inhibits childhood development, especially in the presence of other trying circumstances.

This conclusion was most obvious by the observation that every interviewee in the research project had been involved with the state’s department of child protective services at some point during their childhood experience. Commonly referred to as the Department of Children and Families, the state’s child protective services agency is confronted with the demanding task of caring for children under the age of eighteen who have been endangered or neglected in their primary home. An emotional and often traumatic career sector, the department is forced to separate fragile families for the ideal betterment of the child, which often results in an unstable and unpredictable childhood for the afflicted child. Children seized by the Department of Children and Families are often referred to temporary living arrangements in multiple foster care homes or state run group care facilities, and are subjected to a considerable

decrease or discontinuation of contact with their biological relatives. Undergoing the childrearing process and impending childhood experience in the care of state officials with limited or no parental and familial involvement alone breeds a host of negative effects, which are only exacerbated by the added presence of parental incarceration.

Intriguingly, only one of the research subject's commitment to the department's child protective services division correlated to a direct consequence of their parent's arrest. This subject, Yasmine, was brought into the Department of Children and Families system as an infant due to her mother's incarceration. The other subjects in the research pool landed in the care of the state as a result of events or situations that occurred following the onset of the experience of parental incarceration. This means that all but one of the interviewees cannot contribute their commitment to the department of child protective services directly or singularly to their parent's arrest or incarceration. This insinuates that these interviewees were being raised in environments that exposed them to other negative or troubling circumstances beyond merely the event of their parent's incarceration. This conclusion strengthens the belief stated in the literature that while parental incarceration produces many negative effects on child development and adolescent outcomes, it is an event that is often experienced in combination with a host of other risk factors.

Regardless of the reasoning for their commitment to the state's child welfare system, all of the interviewees had suffered negative effects as a repercussion of their childhood and/or their continued involvement with the Department of Children and Families. The research subjects frequently reported great instability in their living arrangement, and stated that they routinely switched foster homes or alternated living situations. One of the subjects (Ashley) was in the midst of a runaway spell at the time of her interview, and admitted that she chose to abandon the residence of her therapeutic foster home in favor of an unstable arrangement with a friend of her

boyfriend. Another subject (Yasmine) was homeless at the time of her interview, and was currently couch surfing with friends across the city of Hartford until her life stabilized.

Interviewees also cited trying living conditions within the foster homes that they resided in, and discussed enduring experiences where they were not adequately fed, forced to live in a room infested with cockroaches, and abused at the hands of other adults and older children in the home. The research subjects also frequently voiced an opinion that they were not properly cared for in the care of the state, and often felt as though their foster families engaged in the department's program only to receive the financial benefits that it entailed.

Ultimately, these findings raise a captivating research question for further study – does a child's commitment to the state's Department of Children and Families child protective services agency supersede the event of parental incarceration in determining a child's life chances and resulting negative effects? From the interviews conducted with the study participants, it is evident that the presence of the state agency as the legal guardian during childhood and adolescence had produced numerous consequences that had negatively correlated to their prospective life chances and outcomes – and perhaps the experience developing as a ward of the state was more impactful in these outcomes than other notable childhood events, such as the incarceration of a parent. Or, as repeatedly referenced in the existing literature, a child's commitment to the Department of Children and Families is merely another compounding risk factor often experienced in the presence of other experiences and events, such as the incarceration of a parent, that can greatly diminish or hinder the positive life chances or outcomes of youth.

A secondary finding that was consistently located among the case studies of the research participants was the presence of severe mental health challenges and diagnoses. All of the

research subjects in the study suffered from a mental health issue to some extent, which greatly inhibited their ability to function as healthy adolescents. In fact, all five of the case study participants were classified by their Department of Children and Families records as having “significant mental health concerns that greatly impacted their day-to-day functionality”. Severe bipolar disorder was overwhelmingly experienced by the subject population, as all but one of the participants had received a confirmation of this clinical diagnosis. The one participant who was not known to suffer from bipolar disorder (Ashley) instead suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, extreme anxiety, and severe depression. In addition to bipolar disorder, the other four research subjects suffered from additional compounding mental health challenges including anxiety, attention deficit disorder, hyperactivity disorder, depression, and obsessive compulsive disorder.

The presence of poor mental health among the subject pool was significant because it corroborated the claims of the previously identified research that stated the risk of deteriorating mental health post-parental incarceration. There was a strong connection between the five case study participants in that they all had experienced the incarceration of a parent and they were all presently suffering from mental health disorders. But it cannot be definitively concluded that the experience of parental incarceration is what caused the onset of their poor mental health – the causation relationship simply cannot be firmly established in the presence of other compounding risk factors. The participants in the survey had experienced other events before, during, and after the incarceration of their parent that also had the potential to negatively impact the status of their mental health. These events included witnessing domestic abuse, being physically and sexually abused, participating in sex trafficking operations, abusing substances, living in extreme poverty, and experiencing economic and residential instability at a young age. While it is acknowledged

that the experience of having an incarcerated parent during childhood is recognized as being negatively impactful on an adolescent's mental health, it cannot be separated from or deemed more impactful than the presence of other risk factors.

What can be concluded from the case study observations of this research project is that the children of incarcerated parents will typically have an adverse childhood experience score (ACE score) that is higher than that of children who have not had an incarcerated parent. This claim is supported by the previously drawn conclusions in this discussion because although we cannot separate the event of parental incarceration from other risk events, it can be concluded that children who experience the incarceration of a parent are typically exposed to additional risk events and factors beyond the event of parental incarceration. The experience of these numerous risk events in conjunction with the experience of parental incarceration resultantly increases the adolescent's ACE score.

This assertion is not to say that children who have not experienced the incarceration of a parent cannot have a high ACE score. It is certain that children unaffected by parental incarceration can still experience events and risk factors that produce the outcome of a high childhood ACE score, especially in impoverished urban communities such as those within the city of Hartford. These communities often expose children to extreme levels of poverty, frequent drug and substance abuse, domestic violence, single parent households, and street level violence at high rates – factors that also have a significant influence on an adolescent's ACE score. However, children of incarcerated parents often experience an identical set of risk factors that are compounded and exacerbated by the event of parental incarceration, which results in their ACE score typically being even higher than their unaffected counterparts.

The presence of higher ACE scores within urban adolescent populations and in the population of children with incarcerated parents evidences the endangerments of growing up in fragile families submerged in at-risk neighborhoods. Elevated ACE scores increase the long-term probability of experiencing significant negative emotional, mental, and physical health effects throughout adolescence and adulthood, and the high concentration of ACE events in disadvantaged urban communities is concerning. From the observations drawn in the case studies of this particular research project, it must be considered if the presence of high ACE scores within the populations of urban youth contributes to the overall outlook of disadvantaged communities such as the city of Hartford. For further study, it would be of interest to study disadvantaged and impoverished urban communities from a socioeconomic and social perspective and research the average ACE score of the population in these communities.

Another result deciphered from the case study observations of the research project was the presence of young motherhood for the two female participants in the study. The increased likelihood of becoming a teenage parent was not a conclusion drawn in the existing literature on the negative effects of parental incarceration, but is one that could serve as an intriguing research question for future study. While the sample size is small, it is interesting to note that forty percent of the total participant population had a child and that none of the young parents currently held custody of that child. A definitive conclusion cannot be drawn based on the size of the participant population, but it must be considered if the event of parental incarceration increases the risk of a child becoming a young parent. Again, this correlation is difficult to conclude based on the presence of other risk factors, but it is entirely possible that the incarceration of a parent increases the probability of an adolescent experiencing the event of unplanned pregnancy.

Based on the results collected in the research study, it can be concluded that the event of parental incarceration is one that has a significant impact on the continued relationship of the child and the incarcerated parent. Of the five research participants observed in the study, none of them reported the existence of a strong relationship with their formerly incarcerated parent today. Four of the research participants professed no desire to reconnect with their incarcerated parent in the future, and expressed great dislike and disdain for the affected parent. The fifth research participant's formerly incarcerated parent was now deceased, and she could not speak on the status of their present relationship due to his death. The relationships that the other four participants described as currently having with their affected parent can be summarized as overwhelmingly negative. Feelings of anger, disgust, resentment, and bitterness were commonly expressed, and the participants did not express a desire to reconnect with their parent in the future.

The reasons that the participants provided for their unwillingness to establish a new relationship with their incarcerated parent were varied and tailored to their individual experience. But there are several trends that shined from within the individual stories. The first is the sentiment that the parent had failed to be present in their life before and during their sentence, and that the parent had already missed out on too many life phases to now be allowed access. The research participants expressed feeling as though this process would be too much work, and did not see the point in undertaking the task at at this adolescent stage. Secondly, the research participants expressed a firm belief that they did not care about their parent and that their present absence did not matter to them due to the lack of care that they felt emotionally. These sentiments are rooted in the status of their relationship with their parent prior to their prison admission, as the parent-child relationships that existed prior to their incarceration were typically

not strong. All of the research participants in the study reported that they did not have a “good” relationship with their parent before they went to prison, which again insinuates that the presence of other pre-existing risk factors, in addition to the event of parental incarceration, combine to produce an overall negative effect on the longevity and the strength of the parent-child relationship.

The results of this particular research study further found that the presence of and characterization of contact maintained between a research participant and their parent during their incarceration had no effect on the status of their current relationship. Research previously conducted on the topic indicated that continued contact between an incarcerated parent and their child supported the sustained development of the parent-child relationship and typically resulted in better parent-child relationships later in life. However, the present parent-child relationship outcome for the research participants who reported either speaking to or visiting their parent in prison did not differ from that of the research participants who did not maintain contact with their incarcerated parent. From these results alone, it can be concluded that the maintained contact of incarcerated parents and their children does not influence the status of the parent-child relationship post-incarceration or later in life. However, it must again be noted that this conclusion is drawn from a small research subject population, and cannot necessarily be examined as a representation of the overall affected population as a whole.

While the research participants acknowledged the poor status of their present relationship with their parent following their incarceration, they were not as adamant that their incarceration had necessarily impacted them negatively. Two of the participants stated that their parent’s incarceration had produced no negative effects and that they did not feel any repercussions of their experience. However, it must be considered that this assertion may not be a genuine belief,

and that it could be a statement that the participants made in an effort to appear unbothered by their circumstance. This limitation is one that must be considered, especially due to the status of the participant's mental health. It is wholly possible that the sentiments expressed by the research participants are skewed, and that the assertions made are not an accurate representation of their internal feelings. Contrastingly, three of the research participants did acknowledge the detrimental effects of their parent's incarceration on their life and reflected that the experience had produced an array of negative consequences. From the understanding of the existing literature in the field, it was a given that the experience of parental incarceration would produce negative effects and outcomes for the adolescent subject population, but it is interesting that only a portion of the subject population admitted to this realization during the case study and interview process.

Perhaps the most compelling conclusion drawn from the case study observations in the research study is the presence of justice-involvement among the children of incarcerated parents. All but one of the participants in the research study had been involved in the juvenile justice system to some extent, while the single participant who had not been formally involved in the system admitted to regularly engaging in numerous illegal activities, such as stealing, marijuana use, and engaging in sexual activity for financial profit. One of the participant's involvement with the juvenile justice system was confined to a single event only, while the other three justice-involved research participants had been arrested on numerous occasions for various infractions. While none of the participants had committed violent acts that had resulted in extensive consequence or punishment, it is alarming that their involvement in and commitment of illegal activities had become such a frequent occurrence during their adolescence.

This particular research study concluded by finding that eighty percent of the participants who suffered from the experience of parental incarceration had become justice-involved themselves during their adolescence. It must be noted that this conclusion is drawn from a limited subject pool and likely does not accurately portray the percentage of the overall affected population. In other words, eighty percent of all children with incarcerated parents are not justice-involved – a fact that is corroborated by the claims presented in the review of the existing literature. However, it is startling to note the prevalence of justice involvement among the limited research pool, and the conclusion can be used to infer that the incarceration of a parent does to some extent increase the probability of a child becoming justice-involved.

The amplified probability of children with incarcerated parents becoming justice-involved cannot be blamed solely on the experience of parental incarceration. As recognized throughout the research study, there are a number of other risk factors at play in these adolescent's lives that collectively added to their prospective risk of justice-involvement. The research participants were exposed to environments rich in criminal activity during their childhoods, and endured other mitigating factors such as physical and sexual abuse and entrapment in poverty that can also be considered contributing factors in increasing the risk of justice-involvement for children of incarcerated parents.

Several of the research participants made intriguing statements during the interview process when they admitted that the commitment of criminally deviant acts was commonplace to them because they had witnessed their parents frequently disobeying the law. These participants asserted that they learned from their parents, and therefore naturally inherited their parent's misbehavior. One participant (Treyquan) even mentioned that he reasoned it was acceptable to get in trouble because his mother had always been in trouble herself. These statements strengthen

the theory that intergenerational incarceration does exist, and that the experience of having incarcerated parents does increase a child's risk of eventual justice involvement as well.

Despite the justice-involvement and confessed criminal activity of the research participants, there was an overall ray of positivity present when discussing their future life chances and outcomes. The research subjects overwhelmingly spoke highly of their future endeavors, and professed dreams and aspirations of graduating from college and living a comfortable socioeconomic life. The participants envisioned themselves as having stable employment and living in their own homes, and painted an image of their upcoming lives as being an embodiment of the stereotypical "American dream". Only one participant (Mickey) counteracted this fantasy, as he utterly lacked hope for the positive prospects of his future and believed that his only options were to soon be dead or in jail. However, Mickey portrayed himself as being accepting of these dire consequences due to his gang allegiance, and stated that the negative outcomes were viewed as an honor in his circle. Through Mickey's eyes, ending up as another victim of gun violence in Hartford or doing hard time for a violent criminal act was not a negative life outcome – it was sadly a positive one.

The desired life outcomes expressed by the majority of the research subjects were disheartening to hear, as it immediately equated a sense of normalcy to the life situation that simply did not exist. The participants expressed aspirations that were not unlike those of society's typical adolescent – to earn a college degree, to embark on a fruitful career, to purchase a home, and to have an economically stable existence. And yet, when considering the case studies and histories of the research participants, these aspirations seemed as though they were several miracles away. Regrettably, many of the life outcomes that the research participants held did not seem realistic from an outsider's perspective given the circumstances of their current

situation and the limited resources and supports that they had available to them. At the time this research study was conducted, none of the participants had the means, both academically and economically, to attend a traditional four-year college, and there were numerous obstacles in their path that would prevent them from being presently successful in obtaining a crucial bachelor's degree. The research participant's emotional and mental health, substance abuse, residential instability, and lack of present employment were just some of the other factors that made the achievement of such lofty expectations seem unrealistic. As researchers, it was disheartening to hear the participants speak so fondly of their future in light of the overwhelming challenges before them. While externally hoping for the best, internally it was recognized that the odds were tremendously against the research participants, and that barring an exceptional amount of assistance, they would likely not be successful in reaching their lofty expectations in the near future.

An analysis of the research participant's life chances and prospective outcomes would not be complete without considering the role that the city of Hartford had played in producing the despondent outlooks held by the subjects. While Hartford is a city rich in cultural proclamation and community, it is a city of ravaged economic opportunity characterized by a dense population of impoverished individuals and a lack of overall opportunity. The research participants frequently mentioned an absence of prosperity in their familial ties to the city, and often mentioned that they did not know anyone in their immediate family or community who attended college or had a flourishing job. The research participants also referenced their limited exposure to other cities or communities during their childhood and adolescence, and stated that they were frankly unaware of a way of life outside of the one that they had grown accustomed to in Hartford. In these assertions, the study subjects indicated that they felt trapped in the city of

Hartford due to their meager economic status and inability to access opportunities for advancement, and did not see a viable method of escaping the despondent life that had become the norm for them. From these conclusions, it became clear that the research participants did not necessarily believe in the legitimacy of the positive life outcomes that they had professed during the interview process. But, stating these positive life outcomes was their way of professing their ultimate dream – their desire to escape. And yet, it simply did not seem possible for so many of them.

The conclusions drawn above are not to state that the city of Hartford is the root of the problems that the research participants were grappling with. But, the city of Hartford is one concrete entity that can be observed through this lens as a means of suggesting what can be improved in the city to better prepare the next generation of city residents for positive success. It must be considered if the realistic life chances and outcomes of the research participants would be different if they were raised in an environment more stable and less exposing than the one that they were encapsulated within in Hartford. While there are individuals who overcome the trials and tribulations of the city's dire economic means and scarce opportunities to become independently successful, it seems as though the experiences and outcomes of city adolescents more commonly resemble the ones professed by the participants in this research study. Certainly, there are adolescents who utilize the vehicle of education and opportunity to advance beyond the stereotypical norms of young adulthood in the city of Hartford. But too many young people in the city are ultimately falling through the cracks, and because of this, the city as a whole must work to do more.

One of the young people who slipped through the cracks of Hartford's grasp is fifteen-year-old Keon Huff Jr. Keon had been identified as a potential participant in this research study

and was statistically speaking an ideal candidate for study. Tragically, he was shot and killed in the hallway of a North End apartment building by a seventeen-year-old suspect on the night of March 17th. An avid basketball player who frequented the local YMCA and had dreams of either playing professionally or pursuing a career in hip-hop music, Keon was a ward of the state's child protective services agency at the time of his death, and had been reported missing to the Hartford Police Department several times in the weeks immediately prior to his homicide. He had been enrolled as a tenth grade student at the Journalism and Media Academy in Hartford until February, but was not currently attending school at the time of his death for reasons that the city's board of education cannot explain. Keon was frequently described as a bright boy who radiated innate happiness – but he also loved the streets of Hartford. And sadly, the streets of Hartford got to him before the positive Hartford community could save him – Keon fell through the cracks.

Sadly, the life outcome of any of the participants in the research study could become identical to the fate suffered by Keon Huff Jr. An innocent fifteen-year-old boy is ultimately dead today due to the failure of the city of Hartford and the systems that presently exist within it. The city must collectively do more to eliminate the existence of this troubling realities and empower the adolescent and youth populations to believe in the promise of their future. Together, the city must crack down on gun and street violence and keep these children safe. They must invest in the gift of education and repair the city's fragmented system of public schools so that all children, regardless of geographic location or economic opportunity, have access to a quality education that adequately prepares them to pursue a college degree. The city must increase funding for community based organizations and partners to better provide activities and programs and the resources and supports that are needed to fully develop at-risk children into

independent, successful young adults. And lastly, the city collectively needs to do better – everyone needs to do better. Community residents must set better examples for our young people. City leaders must set better examples for our young people. We all must set better examples for our young people. It is on everyone – the city of Hartford must do better.

Part Four – Conclusion

While the conclusions of this particular research study are limited in nature due to the small subject population, it still serves as a convincing corroboration of the claims presented in the pre-existing literature and unmistakably evidences the detrimental role of parental incarceration on children and adolescents. Without question, all five of the research participants interviewed and observed in this case study were suffering from countless detrimental effects as a result of the experiences they endured during their childhood process. Unfortunately, the event of parental incarceration was only one of the negative childhood experiences that contributed to their diminished outcomes and poor life chances, and this particular event could not be separated from the effect of other compounding events experienced during the childrearing process.

The research participants in this study were living an uncommon adolescent experience due not only to their status as the children of presently or formerly incarcerated parents, but also due to their classification as individuals involved with the state's Department of Children and Families agency. This vastly altered the participant's familial identity, as their unstable family experience had been disrupted to various degrees by their placement in the care of child protective services. The experience also signified that the research participants were exposed to an array of internal and external risk factors beyond the sole event of parental incarceration that negatively contributed to the status of their present life outcome.

Ultimately, this research project, like other studies previously conducted in the academic field, could not isolate the event of parental incarceration to determine the effect that it had on adolescent life outcomes and chances – a task that is likely impossible for any research study to achieve. Typically, children of incarcerated parents are exposed to a host of risk factors beyond merely the imprisonment of their parent that contribute negatively to the childrearing process and produce negative effects on the eventual adolescent and young adult outcome and life chance. Rarely, if ever, is the occurrence of parental incarceration the only detrimental childhood event experienced by the subject population, as evidenced by their statistically elevated adverse childhood experience score. Therefore, it is unreasonable to assert that the event of parental incarceration alone breeds the negative life outcomes observed within the subject population of this study. However, it is appropriate to conclude that the experience of parental incarceration was one of the factors that contributed significantly in conjunction with several other substantially mitigating factors to produce negative life outcomes and prospects for future chances within the affected participant population.

Of the specific negative life outcomes observed in this study, the presence of justice-involvement within the subject population was of unique interest. While the number of research subjects was limited, it was startling to conclude that eighty percent of them had been involved to some extent with the juvenile justice system due to the commitment of some illegal act. This finding was troubling, as it was significantly greater than the statistics referenced in the pre-existing literature and blew the conclusions of the accepted national average vastly out of proportion. As researchers, it raised the critical question of why – why was the critical finding of this study so much greater than that of other research endeavors? Was it due to the participant's

status as adolescents with child protective service agency needs? Was it the fault of their poor mental health status? Was it because they were raised in the city of Hartford?

Unfortunately, the limited extent of this research project cannot fully answer these questions based on the surface of the drawn conclusions, but it is most likely that the critical finding of this study is the fault of a collective combination of the circumstances mentioned above. No single risk factor alone can be blamed for the negative life outcome of justice-involvement among the subject population in the same way that no single risk factor alone can be blamed for the negative effects experienced by the subject population following the experience of parental incarceration. In this sense, it can be inferred that life outcomes are a collective process and the result of numerous factors intertwining and interacting with one another at the same time. While certain risk factors such as parental incarceration may be deemed more impactful than other risk factor experiences, it must be considered that they all produce some level of effect on the eventual life chance and outcome experienced by the affected adolescent.

Regardless of this conclusion, it is evident that the experience of parental incarceration is an adverse childhood experience that is capable of inflicting great emotional, mental, physical, and social harm on adolescents and children alike. For these reasons, adolescents similar to those discussed in this research study must receive encompassing services and supports throughout their childhood and adolescence to ensure that their unfortunate circumstances do not ruin their young lives before they truly have a fair chance at being successful. The story of Keon Huff Jr. cannot become the accepted social norm – our community's children cannot fall through the cracks and end up with a bullet in their head in the hallway of a neighborhood apartment complex. More must be done – the community must collectively demand more. The realities of a poor childhood experience and childrearing process do not need to embody the realities of an

adolescent's future. The past cannot be used as a crutch to explain why the future is so dark for the children in communities like the city of Hartford. Change is possible, but the community must believe in the power of that change.

This research project projected the voice of only a handful of the adolescents in the city of Hartford who are slipping further through the cracks of the city's dilapidated foundation on a regular basis. Their circumstances are disheartening – depressing and difficult to bear with the naked ear. But they also serve as realistic evidence of what life in the city of Hartford is all too often like. Their circumstances are not only the result of their parent's imprisonment, but a result of their entrapment in a community rooted in extreme poverty, regular violence, and limited access to opportunity. It is not their fault – but they are paying the ultimate price for a childhood that was all too trying. Perhaps it is too late to alter the fate of the research participants in this study – the damage is done. But the city of Hartford must inspect these case studies as an examination of how the community can do better for the young people that it serves. The city's next generation cannot continue slipping through the cracks. The time has come for the city to construct the resilient foundation that the community's young people need to blossom into the prospering next generation of Hartford's neighborhoods. The time is now. Collectively, the city of Hartford must come together and acknowledge that it can be a better community if every component works together, rather than against each other. This is Hartford – it is a vibrant home for so many people. And it is time for these homes to stop producing adolescents like the ones observed in this research study. No child deserves that fate. The time is now. Hartford must do better.

Part Five – References

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