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PARENTING AFTER PRISON: A MATERNAL APPROACH

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DEDICATION

"Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always." 1 Chronicles 16:11

I dedicate this firstly, to God who has given me strength, patience, and energy especially on the days when I had nothing left to give. Secondly, I dedicate this to my family for the unconditional encouragement and support.

Acknowledgements

To my Committee, Owls, & Ladies from Eddies- Thank you!

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PROLOGUE

This dissertation adheres to a journal-ready format. Three journal articles prepared for submission to refereed journals comprise the first part of the dissertation. Manuscript I, Adjustment and Parenting after Prison: Challenges and Support for Previously Incarcerated Mothers is prepared for the *Journal of Family Issues.* Manuscript II, Left Behind Invisible Bars: Understanding and Supporting Children with an Incarcerated Parent is prepared for the journal *Young Children.* Manuscript III, Lessons Learned Inside the Yard: The Impact of Parenting Classes on Incarcerated Mothers is prepared for the journal *Children and Youth Services Review*.

Dissertation Abstract

A qualitative phenomenological study explored challenges mothers faced after prison in their efforts to be an effective parent and supports that would have benefited the mothers on their journey back to parenting. The information obtained from this study revealed numerous challenges that are potentially widespread for mothers who are parenting after prison and what resources and supports they need to help them adjust to their life as a parent. Next, based on theoretical frames, teachers are provided with practices to use in the classroom and school environment to support children with an incarcerated parent. Last, a case study is shared that examines the impact a parenting class taken while incarcerated has on the mothers once released from prison.

MANUSCRIPT I

Adjustment and Parenting after Prison: Challenges and Support for Previously Incarcerated Mothers

This manuscript is prepared for submission to the peer-reviewed *Journal of Family Issues* and is the first of three manuscripts prepared for a journal-ready doctoral dissertation.

Abstract

This qualitative study explored challenges mothers faced after prison in their efforts to be an effective parent and supports that would have benefited the mothers on their journey back to parenting. This study contributes to the field as it is the first study, to the researcher's knowledge, to provide a view of how mothers adjust back to life outside of prison and navigate their parenting role through the maternal lens. The information obtained from this study revealed numerous challenges that are potentially widespread for mothers who are parenting after prison and what resources and supports they need to help them adjust to their life as a parent.

Keywords: mothers, incarceration, parenting, barriers

Adjustment and Parenting after Prison: Challenges and Support for Previously Incarcerated Mothers

In 1986, Congress passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act that established mandatory prison time for offenders. This Act also included factors such as extensive law enforcement efforts, stiffer drug sentencing laws, and post-conviction barriers to reentry (Haskins, 2016). In part due to these factors, the prison population in the United States increased from 300,000 in 1986 to more than two million drug convictions in 2016, which leads to the highest rate of incarceration in the world (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016; The Sentencing Project, 2019). This number equates every 1 in every 100 adults in America is in a state or federal prison (Cox & Frust, 2019; Mapson, 2013). Further, many of those incarcerated have children, and an estimated 1million children have a parent in prison.

Parental incarceration has been found to have negative consequences, not only on parents, but also on their children. They face challenges such as isolation and disconnection from family (Cochran, 2014; Kregar, et al., 2015; Mowen & Visher, 2016). They also experience a sense of burdens to those family members who offer support because many incarcerated parents face having to leave their children in custodial care with a family member or in the foster care system (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2018). Parents are not able to address the developmental and educational needs of their children when they enter the penal system (Hairston, 2001). The children left behind often have a heightened risk of poor mental health, antisocial behavior, and juvenile delinquency (Burns, 2006; Boswell, 2002; Eden, Nelson, & Paranal, 2004; Hairsong, 2001; Ogbonna & Nordin, 2009; Robbers, 2009). Children who had a parent incarcerated were also likely to be involved in the criminal justice system (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2018).

Although there has been a plethora of research conducted with incarcerated parents, the majority of the studies focused on incarcerated fathers, their experiences, and the impact of parental incarceration on children while they were in prison. Less attention has been paid to previously incarcerated mothers and the challenges they experience as a parent. There is a scarcity of research on how previously incarcerated mothers adjust to their life and parenting role after prison. It is important to study previously incarcerated mothers' experiences and challenges after prison for various reasons.

First, there is a rapid increase among female prisoners over the past thirty years in the United States (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2018). Drug addiction, diagnosis of mental health issues, poverty, and federal legislation all play a part in the unprecedented increase (Allen, Flaherty, & Ely, 2010). Second, the population of previously incarcerated mothers face unique challenges that may have a more significant impact on their primary caretaking role, compared to incarcerated fathers (Mapson, 2013). Third, these mothers not only struggle with their parenting role in prison but also may continue to experience parental hardships after prison such as difficulty with employment due to limited resources and support. These and other personal hardships in turn may lead to high levels of psychological distress for mothers who are taking a primary caregiver role for children (Women in Prison Project, 2006).

In particular Oklahoma has the highest incarceration rate of women in the United States. Over 28,000 children are currently displaced and impacted by the incarceration of a parent and left in the care of a family member in Oklahoma (Oklahoma Department of Corrections, 2018). There is a high rate of incarcerated women in Native Americans, which also provides a unique context for the study as this racial group of women have not been represented in empirical studies previously. Given the prevalence of maternal incarceration and its significance for their

own well-being and their children's in this context, the purpose of this qualitative study is to examine previously incarcerated mothers' transition process after prison with a focus on challenges and support needed in becoming an effective parent in Oklahoma.

After Prison Life: Experiences and Challenges

Reuniting with their children brings joy to many previously incarcerated mothers as children provide meaning and significance to their lives (Comfort, 2008; Roxburg & Finch, 2014). Consequentially, the reunification may also lead to various challenges, including parenting issues, psychological distress, and financial constraints (Christian, 2009). The circumstances of incarceration may disrupt the mother's their life and parenting roles (Murray & Farrington, 2008). For example, lack of control over visitation and communication with the family in prison along with the stigma associated with imprisonment may inhibit these mothers from maintaining close contact with their children and other family members (Borelli, Goshin, Joestl, Clark, & Byrne, 2010; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). The lack of contact and communication, in turn, may lead to difficulties in developing and maintaining a relationship with their children and a parenting alliance with the child's caretaker.

In addition, previously incarcerated mothers violate traditional gender stereotypes in society when they commit crimes and destroy the expectations of motherhood (Enos, 2001). When mothers are imprisoned, they are stripped of their identity as a mother and become merely a number for identification purposes by the department of corrections (Easterling, 2012). Although "motherhood" is embedded within our society as a universal concept of a "noble calling" (Morash & Schram, 2002, p. 73), the parenting role of these previously incarcerated mothers was restricted and challenged by a culture that paints them as unworthy inmates. These challenges make it difficult for the mother to regain the confidence to reprise her mothering role

as an effective parent after prison (Benedict, 2009). They need to work hard on reconstructing themselves and reprising their identity to become effective mothers (Enos, 2001).

After prison, previously incarcerated mothers often face financial hardships (Women in Prison Project, 2006), and deal with frustrations and feel powerless when trying to navigate resources after incarceration (Storm & Storm, 2011). For example, newly released mothers are obligated to pay restitution and/or court charges, as well as parole fees, which can make it difficult for mothers to find affordable housing and other necessities. Even if a mother can afford an appropriate place to live, many landlords will not rent to someone with a criminal background (Alexander, 2012; Storm & Storm, 2011). Statistics who that previously incarcerated mothers often come from low-income families, have low educational levels, and have difficulty with employment, which may contribute to this challenge (Haskins, 2016; Women in Prison Project, 2006). Another potential reason is the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, which mandated strict lease enforcement of public housing agencies permitting the eviction of any tenant, household member, or guest engaged in any criminal activity.

These personal and parenting challenges may also result in psychological distress in mothers including guilt, stress, and loneliness (Allen, Flaherty, & Ely, 2010). When a mother is taken from a family, whether by death or incarceration, the ripple effects of her loss are felt by every member of the family. This adds an extra burden to her extended family, friends, and community members (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2018), which is likely to lead to feelings of guilt and stress. Many of these mothers have turned to illegal drug use as a way to cope with personal stress and negative emotions in their lives, which resulted in their incarceration (Women in Prison Project, 2006). These women must find healthier ways to manage their emotions while developing confidence in their ability to parent (Sime & Sheridan, 2014). To overcome these

multiple challenges and stressors, mothers may need to depend on external supports and resources to assist them in becoming an effective parent after prison (Haskins, 2016).

After-Prison Needs: Resources and Supports

Given these accumulative challenges and stressors after being released from prison, multiple resources and supports are needed in order to function successfully in society and serve as an effective parent (i.e., family supports, community resources, and personal resources). Family support has a profound impact on positive reentry and adjustment into society (Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 1999). Family and social networks provide influential and powerful contexts in which we exist because they are a strong force, motivator, and resource (Young, Taxman, & Byrne, 2002). The importance of this type of support (e.g., caring for children) is even more salient for incarcerated parents. Parents who stay connected with their families during incarceration generally see more positive outcomes than those who do not, such as increased resiliency among children and lowered risk of substance abuse (Luke, 2002). Positive support from family is a major contributor to mothers' ability to manage life post incarceration, gain custody of children, and subsequently enact their "ideal of mothering" (Hayes, 2009, p. 232)

There are significant financial constraints after prison; therefore, it is important to have strategies and supports in place to assist with adjustment and parenting. Some of the most needed areas for incarcerated parents in terms of financial resources are affordable housing arrangements, employment opportunities, and transportation. Sime and Sheridan (2014) explain that recently released mothers who are living in poverty struggle to respond to the day-to-day needs of their children. Feeding, clothing, and supporting their children's development are a constant worry and challenge. Housing, employment opportunities, and transportation are necessary for the parent to meet the basic needs of the family and obligations that these mothers

must fulfill (Haskins, 2016). Previously incarcerated mothers have difficulty securing and maintaining employment after re-entry since employers are reluctant to hire those with criminal records (Urban Institute, 2008). In addition to a criminal record, limited education, the stigma of incarceration, and a lack of employment history contributes to limited employment opportunities (McGrew & Hanks, 2017).

Despite this financial adversity, previously incarcerated mothers have limited access to most of the public assistance programs and potential community resources such as food banks, recovery programs, and public transportation due to living in rural or poor communities that do not offer such services (Herrera, 2017; Sharp, 2014). Drug-related criminal records also make previously incarcerated parents ineligible for government assistance including health care or food stamps for their children (Mapson, 2013). In 1996, President Clinton signed a law that permanently barred individuals with drug-related felony crimes from receiving federally funded public assistance, thus excluding mothers with a criminal record and their children from having access to these programs (Alexander, 2012).

The government's lack of prison reform from a legislative standpoint is setting these mothers and their children up for failure with the lack of resources and supports offered to them upon reentry. Community resources and supports outside prison life are imperative to a successful integration back into family-life after incarceration including parenting prison programs, child welfare practices, and the Adoption and Safe Families Act (Allen, Flaherty, & Ely, 2010; Mapson, 2013). In particular, research (Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 1999) shows that informal social bonds (e.g., faith-based organizations, law abiding neighbors, families, and communities) are the strongest predictor of whether a person will refrain from committing a

crime (Petersilia, 2003). Without strong support in the community to help negotiate the rules and regulations of public agencies, many mothers can quickly recidivate (Mapson, 2013).

Besides these external supports and resources, the role of personal resources such as resiliency and motivation may remain critical for many recently released mothers. Despite all adversities previously incarcerated mothers face, many are resilient and motivated by their children and their desire for a better life (Young, Taxman, & Byrne, 2002). For example, many mothers continue to pursue personal growth, rehabilitation, and participate in educational programs they began during incarceration (Clarke-Stewart, 2001; Herrera, 2017). These educational opportunities can lead to better wages and higher self-esteem for the mothers. Additionally, improvements in the quality of parent-child relationships have been reported due to increases in parents' positive attitudes around effective parenting (Clarke-Stewart, 2001). More studies are needed to better understand the overall adjustment process of previously incarcerated mothers after prison and identify challenges and resources to support them in the process.

The Present Study

Despite the increasing number of incarcerated women and the negative impact on them, their children, and their families, there is limited research on previously incarcerated mothers, particularly emphasizing the challenges and needs of these mothers' experience after prison. Previous research has focused on incarcerated males or the damaging effects incarceration has on children only. The qualitative inquiry that would capture the multitude of their challenges and needs from their own perspectives is particularly scarce. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore parenting after prison and to address the challenges, obstacles, and supports in Oklahoma where maternal incarceration is prevalent. From data collected through multiple sources, this

study allows an in-depth inquiry to capture the mother's voice and perspective to be heard. The following two prevailing questions guided this study:

1. What challenges do mothers experience in their adjustment and parenting role after prison?
2. What support and resources would have benefited the mothers in their adjustment and parenting role after prison?

Method

This study used a phenomenological approach for the purpose of understanding an experience lived through the participant while taking into consideration how a phenomenon is influenced by the context within which it is situated (Glense, 2011). Qualitative research, and specifically phenomenological studies, are designed to describe, not define (Davis, 1995). The study of the lived experience allows for research inquiry that examines a real-life contemporary phenomenon, in this case, parenting after prison, by exploring situations as individuals experience life (Van Manen, 1990). This approach offers the parental participants the opportunity to share their story of parenting after prison from their own perspective (Merriam, 2009). The stories were told through in-depth interviews to gather the participants' detailed descriptions of their experiences and documented analysis to interpret the data (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002, Simon & Goes, 2010). This study focused on six mothers and their efforts to reunite with their children and begin to rebuild the parent/child relationship despite obstacles they may face.

Participants and Settings

Utilizing convenience sampling, twelve mothers were invited to participate in the study. These mothers were former students of the researcher while they were incarcerated and they voluntarily chose to participate, which helped establish rapport with the researcher and facilitated

open and in-depth responses from the participants. Among them, six mothers met the following criteria and agreed to participate (see Table 1). The criteria for inclusion encompassed the following specifications: (a) recently released from prison, (b) incarcerated at a Correctional Facility in Oklahoma, and (c) current residents of Oklahoma. The participants spent an average of six years incarcerated and separated from their children. All the mothers were convicted of a drug-related crime. Two of the mothers served two sentences in prison. Both slipped back into their previous life of crime after serving their first sentence.

The mothers had been released from prison within the last two years, ranging six months to 15 months, which provides a window of time to capture the reunification process between mother and child, while the mother was still adjusting to life after prison. Half of the participants identified as White and the rest of the participants are Native Americans. The participants were all single at the time of the study and working on an Associate degree. The average age of these mothers is 35 and their age ranged from 32 to 42 years with the majority of the participants having three children, ranging in age from seven to twenty-five years of age. Most of the children are elementary school aged. More detailed characteristics of each participant with pseudonyms chosen by the participants are described below.

Table 1
Demographic Information on Participants

Name (pseudonym)	Race/Ethnicity	Age	Number of children
Amy	Caucasian/White	34	2
Bambi	Native American	33	3
Chevelle	Caucasian/White	32	3

Denise	Native American	36	3
Dona	Caucasian/White	42	3
Journee	Native American	34	2

Amy. Amy was raised in a single-family home by her mother. Amy does not recall any family member being incarcerated when she was growing up. Her mother smoked and drank but Amy felt that was normal and her mother never took it to an unhealthy level. Amy dropped out of high school and believes that her feelings of not fitting in led her to drugs. She was convicted of a drug-related crime when she was 24 years old. She was arrested with her boyfriend and they both were sentenced to ten years. Both of her young sons, ages five and seven, were with her at the time of the arrest and placed into state custody until Amy's mother could care for the children. During her incarceration, she never saw her children due to the distance of the facility from her family. It was not economically feasible for her mother to make the eight-hour round trip with her two young sons.

Bambi. Bambi was raised by her mother and stepfather. Her birth father was incarcerated most of her life and she remembers that her mom did not talk much about him. Her mother worked as a maid and Bambi learned early on that she did not want to clean for other people. She wanted to be a musician when she grew up. Bambi graduated from high school and played soccer. Life was going great at the age of eighteen. Then she met her future husband and began having children. Before Bambi knew it, she was single and caring for her three children. Bambi's ex-husband was a drug dealer and she stated how mad she got at him for using and selling drugs and therefore, kept him from the children the few months leading up to her arrest. She finally could not deal with being a single parent with three children under the age of six and turned to drugs to help her cope with the personal stressors in life. Bambi spent six years in prison without

seeing her children. She only had an opportunity to speak to them on the phone and exchanged letters. Bambi's mother and her stepfather cared for her children while she was incarcerated.

Chevelle. Chevelle grew up in a single parent home with her three siblings. Her mother worked three jobs to support the family. Chevelle had little to no contact with her father throughout her childhood. Chevelle had her first sexual encounter when she was 12 years old and cared little about anything but boys and booze during her teenage years. Chevelle did not graduate from high school and was the self-described life of the party before her arrest in 2010. She reported that drugs were her downfall. She had three young sons but does not remember much about their upbringing. She relied on her mother to help care for her sons before she went to prison, and her mother was the primary caregiver while she served her sentence. Chevelle was able to have in-person visits with her sons four to six times a year including occasional mail and calls.

Denise. Denise was raised by her mother and maternal grandparents. She went from house to house since they were neighbors and remembers having a wonderful childhood. Denise does not remember much about her father, but she thinks he was a long-haul truck driver who stopped by a few times a year. Her mother never married. Denise graduated from high school and dreamt of becoming an artist. Upon graduation, she began working at a local convenience store until her arrest. Denise served time for drugs and arson, spending five years away from her children. Denise explained that her ex-husband left her jaded and she turned to drugs to cope. One night while she was high, she set his house on fire. She reported that she had hit rock bottom and knew prison might be the only way she would get the help she needed. She did not get to see her children and could count on one hand the number of times she spoke to them on the phone.

Denise and her three children lived with her mother and the children were able to reside with her mother during Denise's incarceration.

Dona. Dona and her older sister were adopted to a nice family who already had three children. Dona always wondered why her birth mom did not want her and if it was related to something she did as a child. She did not finish Junior High school and was married by the time she was fifteen years old, having her first child shortly after. Dona was a single mother of three young children when she began selling drugs to make ends meet. She was a hairdresser by trade, but it did not pay the bills or feed a family of four. Dona began her first sentence and passed through three facilities in three years before being released on probation. Dona explained she was not "locked up" long enough to realize the damaging affects her crimes had on her family. Within a year, Dona was back behind bars serving out an eight-year sentence for drugs. Her first husband had custody of her children. Her youngest child was brought to the prison for one visit and there was no contact with her other two children. Her oldest daughter was fifteen and expecting her third child when Dona went back to prison. Dona said at this point she realized she had not been there for her children and vowed to be a better mom and grandmother when she was released. Dona's sister is still serving time in an Oklahoma prison.

Journee. Journee was raised by her mother. Her parents divorced when she was young, and her father was not in her life. Journee did not graduate from high school. Journee now realizes she was suffering from mental illness and was not able to cope in a school setting. Journee bounced from job to job within the fast-food industry until her first arrest of drug possession at the age of eighteen. Journee's two daughters were cared for by her mother. Journee did not see her children because she did not want them to know she was incarcerated. Her youngest daughter was born with special needs and required more care than her mother could financially handle as

the child got older. Journee gave her daughter up for adoption so she could have a better life and remove the stress from her own mother. Journee had a sister in prison with her, who served time at the same facility.

Data Collection and Procedures

As part of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process, a consent form was given to each participant who agreed to participate in the study after the researcher personally contacted the mothers who fit the criteria by email. Demographic and background information was obtained through a Qualtrics questionnaire administered before the initial interview. Each participant completed the questionnaire using a link sent to them via email. The questionnaire allowed the participants to answer some personal questions they might not feel comfortable answering verbally, in the face-to-face interviews (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). Questions, such as what age they were when they were incarcerated, how many children were living with them at the time of their arrest, and how long they served in prison.

The purpose of the interview was to collect information from participants in order to understand their adjustment and parenting after prison from a maternal lens. This is a topic that cannot be directly observed but where interviews are an appropriate method of data collection (Yin, 2006, 2009, and 2011). The participants were interviewed twice, each ranging from one to two hours in length. The importance of the two interviews allowed the researcher to gain useful insight from the first interview to form questions that complemented the participant's answers during the second interview. The initial interview utilized a set of questions predetermined by the researcher.

The majority of questions for the second interview were formed from the initial interview responses as a follow-up. Each interview location was determined by the participant's current

residency. The interviews took place in local restaurants and coffee shops, close to each participant's home or place of employment, and where the participants felt comfortable. The researcher ensured the interviews were conducted in low traffic areas and kept private and confidential as possible in the public areas. The interviews were audio recorded to ensure the participant's stories were not construed by possible errors in written form. A semi-structured approach to the interviewing process was utilized. A majority of the interview questions related to their experiences and parenting during and after prison, such as obstacles the mothers faced regaining custody of their children, if they had contact with their children while incarcerated, and if they felt they were currently better prepared to be an effective parent. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for developing codes and themes.

The mothers were also asked to keep a parent log for three weeks in which they documented such things as their personal reflections and their children's responses to spending time with them. They were asked to respond to the log at least two days a week. The researcher provided the parenting log notebooks and writing prompts with open-ended questions to each of the participants. The writing prompts included: (a) obstacles they face after prison that may hinder them from being an effective parent, (b) what support/resources/information would have benefited them in becoming a more effective parent, (c) a parenting method they use to help them bond with their child, and (d) an open-ended prompt where the mother can talk about what's on their mind regarding their children and/or their parenting.

Data from the in-depth interviews, questionnaire responses, and parent logs were transcribed verbatim and entered into a password protected spreadsheet. This helped with sorting and organizing the vast amount of information that was obtained from the participants.

Data Analysis

Keeping the research questions in mind, the researcher looked to identify categories and themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Patterns predicted initial codes based on the literature review used in this study. Level one analysis determined the need for evidence to match the study's paradigm. For example, open coding was conducted to provide the categories for the emerging themes. Level two analysis included re-examining codes and collapsing codes. Level three analysis looked at all the themes across the board to make sense of the data and ensure that it reflects the story being told.

Using multiple sources allowed cross-verification, helping make meaning while triangulating the data (Bazeley, 2013). Triangulation of interviews, questionnaire, and the mother's log occurred during the data analysis process. Triangulating the data minimized any bias that could have transpired within the conclusions or findings. Data were compared to see if the inferences drawn from one type of data were comparable with those obtained in other types of data (Bazeley, 2013). Triangulation also occurred by connecting the research back to the existing body of literature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings and Discussion

This qualitative study explored challenges mothers faced after prison in their efforts to be an effective parent and supports that would have benefited the mothers on their journey back to parenting. Data analysis included looking for patterns and themes between the data sources. Five major themes emerged from the analysis (see Table 2): 1) adjusting to the parenting role, 2) personal barriers, 3) criminal discrimination, 4) family/peer support, and 5) mothers' desires and motivation. The outcomes from each of the five themes are expressed below.

Table 2

Overarching Themes

Overarching Theme	Categories	Description
Adjusting to the Parenting Role	Mixed feelings about their return and new role as a parent Parenting challenges and role ambiguity Different adjustments by circumstances	Mixed feelings such as excitement, resentment, guilt, and grief Parenting is harder than expected since returning home Ease of adjustment differ by personal and family circumstances
Personal Barriers	Psychological distress and mental health concerns Poverty Friends/ lack of friends Difficulty with former spouses	Dealing with past addictions Loneliness, anxiety, depression, isolation, claustrophobic Low wages and responsible for paying restitution fees Developing friendships prove difficult with limited social time due to working multiple jobs and few opportunities to meet new people Having to face former spouses
Criminal Discrimination	Several restrictions to daily life Criminal stigma	Difficulty renting and getting access to many public places and events due to past record Ankle monitor inhibits freedom Gossiping and disapproval in community and feeling of discomfort in social settings
Family/Inmate Peer Support	Instrumental support including living arrangements and monetary support Emotional support Substitute caregiving role for children Inmate peer support	Provided a place to live for the children and mother Clothing, school supplies, and sports equipment paid for by mother/grandmother Confidant, biggest supporter during and after incarceration Cared for children during and after incarcerated Shared experiences and understanding Friendship and accountability Strong desire to repair their relationships with their children and be a good mother

Mothers Desire and Motivation for Better Life and Parenting	Dedication to their children Motivated to stay clean	Motivation to stay out of trouble and in recovery

Adjusting to the Parenting Role

Upon release, the participating mothers who were incarcerated began to build their life in order to gain custody of their children. Each of the participants wrote in their parent log that the only thing that got them through the tough years in prison was the thought of being reunited with their children.

> *I would fall asleep at night in my bunk dreaming of the day I would be reunited with my children. Do not get me wrong, I love being home and with my children, but it is hard to adjust to life outside of prison and all the demands I have on myself. While I was incarcerated, I knew they were being cared for and were safe. Now, I have all that responsibility of keeping them safe and happy. It is a lot to process.* (Bambi)

However, all six participants had to deal with adjustment challenges and reuniting with their children seemed difficult in the beginning. They had mixed feelings ranging from joy to despair because what they expected to be a time of celebration, abruptly ended when life stressors and parenting challenges began to take over. Reunification challenges including parenting issues, psychological distress, and financial constraints are well documented in the literature (Christian, 2009). Adjusting to being a mother again was more difficult than they thought and it took more time for their children to be comfortable with them than they expected. Bambi and Amy both wrote in their parent log that there were days they wished they were back in prison due to the difficulties of adjusting to motherhood and life after prison. The lack of contact and communication mothers have with their children while in prison often leads to difficulties in developing and maintaining a relationship with their children once they are free (Borelli, Goshin, Joestl, Clark, & Byrne, 2010; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010).

Another category that emerged was role ambiguity between the mother and grandmother. The participants experienced having to redefine their role as a mother upon returning home. They felt a loss of their role as a mother as they relied upon on their own mothers for care and support for themselves and their children. It was an adjustment trying to find their maternal voice when reuniting with their children since they were cared for by the grandmother for years. Some of their children were so young when their mothers were incarcerated, their grandmother was the only mother they knew. Bambi felt conflicted as she was grateful for her mother's willingness to care for her children but concerned about her mother's parenting style. Somewhat ironically, this conflict allowed her to define herself as a better mother than her own mom.

It appears that some participants took more time adjusting while dealing with some additional or greater challenges due to their family circumstances. For example, Dona's adjustment process was somewhat more challenging than the other mothers because she was not only a mother, but also now a grandmother. Although she expressed her excitement and desire to return to a caretaker role, this situation seemed to pose an additional burden on her and her family. Dona revealed in her interviews,

> *I am a grandma now! I want to be there for my own three children and my five grandchildren. When I first returned home, I took my kids to the side and told them it is time to forgive me and we need to move on. I told them I was clean, and I plan to stay that way. I promised them I would not let them down and I want to be part of my grandkid's lives. At this point, we are adjusting. There is still a lot of pain and hate. I was gone so long. It will take time, and I am okay with working with time.*

Journee's experience was also unique compared to the other mothers. Journee has two daughters but gave her youngest up for adoption because of her special needs that required more care than her mother could financially handle while she was in prison. Journee expressed feelings of guilt in her first interview,

> *I was recovering from multiple injuries and was approached to give up my youngest daughter for adoption. I knew I was facing years in prison. My youngest daughter was born with major disabilities and I could not leave that burden on my mother, who was caring for my oldest daughter as well. The family that adopted my youngest child allows me to see her and supply diapers and essentials when I can.*

Easterling (2012) discusses how hard it is for mothers to become parents again after being released from prison. For years they were stripped of their identity as a mother and were merely a number by the department of corrections. Moreover, incarcerated mothers have violated traditional gender stereotypes in society when they commit crimes and destroy the expectations of motherhood (Enos, 2001). It is no wonder that, when released, these women had difficulty adapting to their previous role as mothers and/or negotiating the role of mother with their own mothers.

Personal Barriers

The participating mothers also reported personal barriers to overcome for successful adjustment to their daily lives and parenting roles. Mental health issues, living in poverty, and relationship concerns coupled with the fear of falling back into drugs weighed heavily on their minds. Before prison, these women self-medicated with illegal drugs and alcohol to help cope with underlying diagnoses. Out of the six participants, five noted they were nervous about falling back into the drug scene. Journee shared in her interview the reason behind her second conviction and time in prison,

> *I was under the influence of drugs and alcohol while driving and killed two children, my beautiful niece and sweet nephew. I vowed to never drink alcohol or touch drugs again. I will never forget what I did and the anguish I live with. That is one promise I plan to keep in honor of my niece and nephew.*

As these women illustrate, drug addiction, diagnosis of mental health issues, poverty, and federal legislation have played a part in the reasons for their imprisonment (Allen, Flaherty, & Ely, 2010). While incarcerated, the participants were able to receive treatment for mental health

issues, such as bipolar disorder, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder from childhood traumas that had been undiagnosed before incarceration. They had counseling with a licensed Psychiatrist and prescribed medication to help with their diagnosis. The participants all stated they hoped they were prepared for life challenges once they were released.

The participants were all from single family homes and had their share of poverty issues growing up. Upon release, they are experiencing poverty once again. These mothers face difficulty meeting their basic needs, such as housing, employment opportunities, and transportation (Haskins, 2016). Previously Dona wrote in her questionnaire,

> *I thought everyone was poor like I was when I was younger. We had one car, siblings shared bedrooms, and walked to school. It really did not hit me how destitute we were until I had children of my own. I wanted to give them everything I never had. After being in prison for over a decade, I am poor again. I walk to work. I have so many fees to pay from being in prison. I would be homeless if I did not have family to live with.*

Dona and Denise had another issue with family that interfered with their adjustment after prison. They both shared they were dealing with the children's fathers and that was something they had not had to do in years. Denise was dealing with her toxic past relationship where she was charged with arson to her ex-husband's home while high on drugs. She said in her first interview,

> *I was not mentally prepared for my ex-husband to try and come back in my life. I spent five years forgiving myself and getting better for my children. When I thought about my future, I never once pictured him in it. I want to just be a mom for once and not be remembered as the crazy ex-wife. I will not go down that path again.*

Criminal Barriers and Discrimination

As former prisoners are often known to face discrimination in finding employment, housing, and qualifying for social services (Haskins, 2016), the participants expected they would receive criminal background checks on job applications, which would serve as a barrier for some part of their after-prison life. However, the barriers that they experienced were more than they

expected and many were unexpected. The participating mothers were prohibited from participation in casual routines and leisure activities with family members. For example, Chevelle could not meet her mother for lunch at the casino where she is employed because they served alcohol. Similarly, Journee's criminal past kept her from playing billiards at the local pool hall because they also served alcohol; she could not be in an establishment that had a full-service bar. Bambi added how her criminal record prohibited her from participating in a leisure activity with her oldest child. (can you tell us what the activity was?)

Chevelle is on probation for another year and wears an ankle monitor that tracks her location and she is only allowed to leave her house for specific reasons such as doctor appointments and visits to her parole officer. Attending sporting events for her children was not allowed. Chevelle wrote in her parent log,

> *I cannot attend my oldest son's baseball or basketball games because I cannot travel outside of a twenty-mile radius. It messes with your head for sure. I always wear long pants to keep my ankle monitor covered but I still feel like a prisoner most days.*

Whether self-imposed or blatant, the women experienced many barriers when trying to fit back into society (Haskins, 2016). Most of the participants reported they avoid going to their children's schools or community events due to the stigma associated with being a former inmate. Three of the mothers also experienced some stigma as a criminal and social exclusion in their local communities. Dona revealed in her second interview about her experience with discrimination while running errands,

> *The whispers at Wal-Mart is what bothers me most. I went back to my hometown because of my children and grandchildren. I try not to let the stares and whispers bother me, but they do. It is hard trying to live a good life after prison and be a good mom. I did wrong and I feel like I paid for my crime. I guess it will never be enough for some people.*

Family/Peer Support

From the questionnaire, participants shared many adverse childhood experiences such as poverty and lack of parental supervision and support during their formative years. While the participants were in prison and returned from prison, their family became the core support system. A unique finding from this study is that all of the participants had family to return to upon release. Family support was critical in assisting these women with emotional, financial, and housing support. All the participants noted their families were the primary and foremost source of support. Due to financial constraints and difficulties in obtaining a job, families provided various monetary support. For example, all the participants in this study moved in with family members when they were released. They could not afford housing right out of prison and by law would be denied public assistance to help pay for housing (Alexander, 2012). The cost of first and last month rent, security deposit, utilities, and furnishings are just not feasible for many struggling single parents. Journee said in her first interview,

> *I was thankful for my mother's assistance. She had a room ready for me. I know it does not sound like a lot but after years of not having your own space, it meant the world to me. She decorated the room in my favorite colors and made the bed up with the softest blanket I had ever felt. This honestly made me feel like she wanted me home and was happy I was coming home.*

Upon release, the participants relied solely on family support. They did not check into outside supports, in part, due to their fear of facing potential bias and embarrassment. Both while they were in prison and even after they were released, their mothers played a particularly important role by providing extensive care and emotional support. As grandmothers and the custodial parent to their children, they supplied clothing, school supplies, and sports equipment. Nelson et al. (1999) state that family support has a profound impact on positive reentry and adjustment into society. Bambi stated in her first interview,

> *My mom took care of my kids for six years and welcomed me back home with arms wide open. My mom was always there for me and my children all those years I struggled with*

drugs and was incarcerated. I can never express to her how much her support meant to me, even though it took me years to appreciate her sacrifices. Her health is not good. She needs me now and I am glad I can help. Now that I am drug-free, I can take care of her and my children. We live with her and will remain with her as long as she needs me.

Lastly, the participants received support from peers they met while incarcerated and stayed in contact with them once released. Half of the participants were released within a few weeks of each other and ended up residing in the same town with their mothers. These women did not know one another before they were sentenced, but quickly bonded over similar life experiences while incarcerated. Since they were cut off from the outside world and had limited contact with loved ones while in prison, they formed a strong bond and they continue to support each other now. They communicate daily, meet for lunch when they can, hold one another accountable, and offer encouragement and understanding. As Young et al. (2002) explain, family and social networks are strong resources and motivators for women once they are released from prison.

Mothers Desires and Motivation for Better Life and Parenting

Similar to previous research (Clarke-Stewart, 2001; Herrera, 2017), these women plan to continue to pursue personal growth, rehabilitation, and participate in educational programs. These educational opportunities can lead to better wages and higher self-esteem. All six participants were planning to continue their education by earning a college degree. Amy's second interview revealed that she currently held a job but that her dream is to have a career.

A career to me is steady income with great benefits. I will have set hours, vacation days, and an official title. I know it sounds odd, but it is what success looks like to me. I feel like my children will respect me more and be proud to tell their friends where I work and what I do for a living. I must stay motivated to stay the course.

Additionally, improvements in the quality of parent-child relationships have been reported due to increases in parents' positive attitudes around effective parenting (Clarke-

Stewart, 2001). All the mothers mentioned a strong desire to repair their relationships with their children and to be a good mother, which seemed to serve as an important internal resource for their adjustment to after-prison-life. They are also motivated to stay law abiding citizens and continue in their recovery efforts from their past drug addictions.

Conclusion

The goal of the current study was to examine previously incarcerated mothers' transition process after prison with a focus on challenges and resources/supports that benefit them in becoming an effective parent. This study contributes to the field as it is the first study, to the researcher's knowledge, to provide a view of how mothers adjust back to life outside of prison and navigate their parenting role through the maternal lens. The information obtained from this study revealed numerous challenges that are potentially widespread for mothers who are parenting after prison and what resources and supports they need to help them adjust to their life as a parent.

Life in prison can be detrimental to the parent-child bonds of incarcerated mothers and the impact lingers long after their release. Life after prison also does not seem as easy as one might expect. The major findings indicated that all participating mothers experienced various challenges adjusting to their outside prison life as a person and parent. They had been waiting for their release with anticipation and excitement to reunite with their children and extended family. Feelings of guilt and resentment prevailed regarding their incarceration and being absent in their children's lives. They faced a multitude of barriers and challenges, some of which were unexpected or more severe than they anticipated (e.g., extreme financial hardship, feeling distanced from their teenage children), which led them to feeling anxious, distressed, and frustrated. The financial obstacles mothers had to overcome to be self-sufficient with their

children included lack of affordable living arrangements, transportation, and employment opportunities.

Some of the findings are consistent with previous studies showing challenges incarcerated parents faced related to parenting after prison and adjustment to daily life such as financial hardships and parenting issues (Christine, 2009; Haskins, 2016; Storm & Storm, 2010; Women in Prison Project, 2006). Similar to the previous literature (Benedict, 2009; Enos, 2001), these challenges appeared to make it difficult for the mother to regain the confidence to reprise her identity as a parent after prison. National data provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2016) revealed that the average incarcerated mother is in her mid-twenties, single, has one to three children, and these mothers typically come from a single-parent or broken home. This national data proves to be true for the participants in this study. No matter how bad the parent's action may have been, whether their involvement was great or minimal in their child's life, the mothers believe that their children still want a relationship with them after prison.

The interviews also revealed accounts of multiple layers of personal issues such as drug abuse, mental illness, and social problems the mothers endured. This complicated and disrupted the mothers' resumed parenting role and efforts. It became clear that their substance abuse problems and criminal justice involvement were symptomatic of troubled childhoods and adverse conditions. Previous research has shown that women, specifically mothers, who are incarcerated face countless hardships prior to beginning their prison sentence (Huebner, 2010). These hardships include untreated mental health issues, living with abuse or past abuse, and lack of a high school diploma (Sharp, 2014). In addition, all mothers reported they experienced discrimination obtaining employment, housing, continuing their education, qualifying for public social services, and other benefits. Once labeled a felon, our society often views criminals as a

second-class citizen even after their time has been served and they have paid their debt to society (Alexander, 2012). Once you are a convicted felon of a drug related crime, you are not permitted to enlist into the military, possess a firearm, and may lose your right to vote (Alexander, 2012). This discrimination and stigma are difficult for the participants to overcome as recorded in the current study.

Given the multitude of challenges in adjusting to their life and parenting role they faced, these mothers desperately needed supports. Their family support, especially their own mother, played the most crucial role in their adjustment. The participating mothers relied heavily on instrumental support (e.g., housing, school supplies for children), emotional support, and continuous caregiving support for their children and expressed gratitude to their family for their sacrifices and ongoing support. The results suggest that their mothers also offered a number of supports and resources to aid in their adjustment of reentry. The participant's stories were not easily quantifiable but offered significant insight and a voice to this invisible population. The mothers shared their past and future, including, stories of psychological distress, stigma, drug abuse, and more.

A family, regardless of the dysfunctionality, could be the only positive to being released back into society for many prisoners (Alexander, 2012; Hayes, 2009). Incarcerated parents who stay connected with their families during incarceration generally see more positive outcomes for themselves and children than those who do not (Luke, 2002) and these supports continued to be most critical for their adjustment after prison. In particular, the findings showed that the participating mothers heavily depended upon their own mother to help care for and support their children while they were incarcerated and after incarceration. Although studies of grandparents raising grandchildren are not new, the rate of grandparents raising grandchildren increased

greatly in the last decade, according to U.S. Census data from 2000 to 2015; there has been a 24 percent increase in grandparents raising grandchildren in Oklahoma alone (U.S. Census, 2014) and this study echoes that statistic and adds more meaning to it. Without the support from the maternal grandmothers, the participants' children would have had to potentially enter the foster care system, which could have resulted in more damage to the family system.

While family support is crucial and appreciated, many previously incarcerated mothers experienced isolation, depression, and limited friendships. Due to various social restrictions and stigmas, their social life and support network was often limited. One interesting finding of this study was the support the mothers found within one another. They formed friendships while incarcerated and were able to continue those relationships, upon release. They were released approximately at the same time and reached out to each other for support and comfort. Given their limited social circle and a fear of criminal stigma, they formed a unique peer support group who can share challenges and concerns as a parent with a similar past, which seemed to reduce their feelings of isolation and help with their adjustment process.

In addition to the two major external sources of support such as family and friends they met in prison; the intrapersonal resources also played an important role in their adjustment. The ability to keep trying under the most difficult of circumstances the mothers displayed and the feeling of obligation that they must be an effective parent are motivators that helped them carry out their family responsibilities for their children. A social investment for a better understanding of family needs and societal responses, as well as dedicated attention to changing the prevailing system is needed. Reclaiming their roles as mothers offers the confidence, hope, and courage to become an effective parent after incarceration. Morash & Schram (2002) remind of us of the challenges mothers face after incarceration by trying to reinvent their mothering roles. Having a

new sense of purpose and being responsible for their children allowed these mothers to parent after prison, even with challenges.

There are some studies (Easterling, 2012; Shalfer & Pehlmann, 2010) that uncovered these challenges and adjustment processes; however, they did not uncover the nuanced account of the deep-rooted emotional struggle that the newly released incarcerated mothers experienced and shared in this present study. It is not easy to access this population for research and it is even more difficult to capture their deep emotional struggles without mutual respect and trust.

Limitations

The five themes that emerged from the study provide an initial glimpse into understanding what mothers faced when parenting after prison. It seems clear that the relationships the researcher built with the participants in the parenting class as an instructor helped make this possible. However, there are several limitations to this study. First, the small convenience sample of mothers was a limitation. A larger sample would allow the researcher to understand if the majority of mothers recently released from prison faced the same challenges as the mothers in this study. Second, the short time frame for the study was a limitation. A longitudinal study following the participants for the next three to five years would offer a window into their ability to continue to adjust to their role as an effective parent. Lastly, although the context of this study is unique and relevant for the topic of maternal incarceration, given its high rate of women's incarceration, this study was conducted in one region. Interviewing mothers from other states to see if they have different perspectives of parenting after prison would also be beneficial.

Implications

Given the dramatic increase in the number of women offenders and the findings of the study on a multitude of challenges and necessary resources and support for mothers after prison, there is a need for strategies that are gender-specific and community based (Mapson, 2013). There is a necessity for effective strategies, which address the barriers that prevent previously incarcerated individuals from successfully reintegrating into their communities. Released prisoners are disadvantaged educationally, economically, and socially, which further perpetuates inequality (Vishner & Travis, 2003).

Men and women released from correctional facilities receive minimal preparation and inadequate assistance and resources, which makes their re-entry into communities challenging (Visher & Mallik-Kane, 2007). A criminal conviction limits employment prospects, public housing assistance, and social services (Coates, 2015). Even having a minor criminal record creates substantial barriers and far-reaching collateral consequences. It is important to transform the current criminal justice system to shift the focus from reincarceration to successful re-entry into their communities (Li, 2018). A focus on pre-release programs, which prepares individuals to be productive members of their communities, is essential.

Providing incarcerated individuals with jobs and life skills, education programming, mental health counseling, and addiction treatment will help overcome some of the challenges they face upon re-entering their communities. Research indicates that inmates who participate in correctional education programs are 43 percent less likely to re-enter prison. In addition, each dollar spent on prison education saves approximately four dollars on reincarceration costs (Department of Justice Archives, 2017).

A growing body of research supports the importance of acknowledging children suffer adverse conditions when a father is incarcerated, yet limited studies have taken into account the

effects when a mother is incarcerated. Women are increasingly becoming the heads of single parent led homes. To a large extent, they are responsible for supporting, nurturing, and educating their children. This study examined how a mother transitions from being a prisoner to getting a second chance to parent. Overcoming personal barriers and family support were two of the key findings from this study. Legislative reform focusing on rehabilitation efforts, family supports, and preparing the mothers for life outside of prison would be most beneficial for correctional facilities to address. These women are not violent criminals. They need help and opportunities for second chances and prison officials could alleviate some of the barriers the mothers face.

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MANUSCRIPT II

Left Behind Invisible Bars: Understanding and Supporting Children with an Incarcerated Parent

This manuscript is prepared for submission to the peer-reviewed journal *Young Children* and is the second of three manuscripts prepared for a journal-ready doctoral dissertation.

Abstract

The stress of having a parent incarcerated may affect a child's school performance. Teachers must have the knowledge needed to help children with incarcerated parents because, many times, teachers are the ones who provide stability into a child's world. This article list strategies teachers can implement in their classrooms to help children cope with life while their parent is incarcerated.

Keywords: teacher, parental incarceration, supporting young children

Left Behind Invisible Bars: Understanding and Supporting Children with an Incarcerated Parent

At the beginning of the school year, most children are excited to get their school supplies and meet their teacher. Excitement builds as they patiently wait for their chance to find their name and picture on their cubbies to be filled with their new crayons, paints, and folders. Unfortunately, this is not the experience for many. Ms. Lacie, a Kindergarten teacher, shared a conversation that happened between her and a student this year: “Teacher, teacher, um, I have no crayons. The night we were going to go, my mom, she got put in jail.” Ms. Lacie was able to give this child crayons, which was their need for today, but she is also able to better meet their needs in the future. As this child’s teacher knowing the home situation will help her realize why the child might have strong burst of different emotions throughout the year and how to help the child cope. This conversation is taking place often in early childhood classrooms across America. As a teacher of young children, if you have not had this conversation or one very similar, statistics show you will likely experience it soon (Poehlmann-Tyann, 2018).

The United States prison population has skyrocketed since 1980. The number of incarcerated women has grown by more than 750 percent. The increase in women’s incarceration, according to criminologists, has been driven by a rise in the imprisonment of poverty-stricken Caucasian women for drug-related crimes (Dillion, 2018). Many of these women are mothers. Recent statistics show that mothers are becoming incarcerated at a higher rate than fathers (The Sentencing Project, 2019). Thus, as the population has risen, so has the number of children growing up with a mother or father behind bars. These children suffering from their parent’s prison sentences and our nation’s tough-on-crime practices are described in a research report (2016) by the Annie E. Casey Foundation:

Children feel the absence of a parent in jail, even if they were not sharing a home. They feel it when people whisper at school or at church. They feel it when the refrigerator is bare, when they move multiple times, and every night when they go to bed wondering what happened or what they did to deserve not having a parent at home anymore. (pp 1)

Given this concern about the increasing maternal incarceration and potential subsequent hardships for children left behind, this article offers insight into educating and supporting the young children whose lives are disrupted due to an incarcerated parent. In the United States, more than six million school-aged children have a parent in jail or prison, according to recent data (Dillion, 2018). For this article, parents in jail or in prison will be referred to as the incarcerated parent. This is a significant increase by one million children affected by this epidemic from 2014 to 2018. This means that one out of every fourteen children have an incarcerated parent in the United States, and it is highly likely that teachers will have one of these children in their classroom (Dillon, 2018; Poehlmann-Tyann, 2018). The prevalence of children whose parents are incarcerated is reflected in the long-running children's TV show, Sesame Street, which hosts a character with an incarcerated parent, indicating how common this situation is in our society. Thus, it is important for teachers to be prepared to understand and help children of an incarcerated parent get through difficult times.

Feeling Left Behind: Instability and Abandonment

For children who have an incarcerated parent, one of the main disruptions is having their home life turned upside down by the change in living arrangements (Easterling, 2012). More than likely children are relocated to be cared for by grandparents, other relatives, or foster care. Children of an incarcerated parent often live in poverty, with a higher rate of homelessness (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2018). Many may not have the opportunity to take their personal

belongings and necessities and only have the clothes on their backs when they arrive at their temporary home. Toys, a favorite stuffed animal, and a sense of security may be wiped away in minutes when a parent is incarcerated, and the child is forced to suddenly be relocated. This instability of their living arrangements may lead these children to be left to fend for themselves emotionally, and the stress of child-rearing falls on a grandparent, or protective services.

These unexpected changes may also cause the children to experience mental health diagnoses, especially with the issues of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and feelings of abandonment (Martin, 2017). Some of these mental issues such as depressive symptoms, which children can be diagnosed with as early as five-years old, may be manifested as challenging behaviors (Beal, 2019). The children would act out their feelings through challenging behaviors because they are too young to understand how to verbalize their emotions. Also, these children often have difficulty focusing on schoolwork and engaging in learning, and thus their grades are likely to suffer. Teachers may interpret these behavioral and learning challenges as attention-deficit disorder or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder when they are really symptoms of emotional stress or trauma due to the shift in the home (Martin, 2017). Due to the various adverse conditions children undergo outside of the classroom, many may need additional support from teachers depending on their age, temperament, personality, family circumstances, and living arrangement. Once teachers can identify children's unique characteristics, situations, and the support the children need, they can use guiding theories to help understand the complexity and promote child development through supportive relationships.

Connecting Through the Developmental Theories

This article looks at how teachers can help teach and support these children from the views of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) and Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2000).

Several developmental theories lay an important foundation for understanding the impact of paternal deprivation on children, such as attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988). To effectively meet children's emotional and educational needs, teachers need to be responsive and care for children with warmth, respect, and trust. Attachment theory has at least two functions pertinent to classrooms. First, secure attachment relationships to a teacher provides feelings of security for children to explore actively and freely. While all children seek to feel safe and secure, attachment helps them balance this need with their innate motivation to explore their environment. Security in the classroom will lead to effective learning and aid in their academic achievement (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Second, attachment forms the basis for socializing children. As children and adults are drawn together and interact harmoniously, children adopt the adults' behavior and values (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Studies have shown that having one caring person, and an ongoing positive relationship with them, can lessen trauma and prevent negative outcomes for children experiencing serious hardships due to a parent being incarcerated (Dillon, 2018).

Attachment Theory is best understood within a current relationship environment that exists between the caring adult and child that endures over time (Bowlby, 1969). Combining Attachment Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Biological Theory appears to be a logical fit to explain the importance of quality attachment and relationships influenced by the child's environment. In addition, according to Bronfenbrenner's (2000) Bioecological Theory, children develop in different systems, which are nested within one another at four levels. This theory provides a framework for examining how individuals are influenced by direct interactions with their environment as well as indirectly by larger social variables across time (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1993). Each layer of the systems plays an important part in the overall development of the child.

Below are four of the bioecological levels that highlight the significance of positive relationships and safe and nurturing environments and articulate how teachers, schools, and the community can work together to support a child with an incarcerated parent.

Microsystem

The microsystem encompasses the child, family, friends, and teacher. At this age, the family and teacher provide the most important interactions. Proximal processes are the main component for child development. Proximal processes function differently for each child, but they enhance the entire bioecological model by strengthening relationships (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In the microsystem, direct interactions are bidirectional between the child and the immediate environments. Not only does the environment have an impact on the child, but the child also affects the environment (Marotz & Kupzyk, 2018).

Build Safe and Nurturing Environment for the Child. The teacher can have a significant role in establishing a secure attachment and positive relationships for years to come. By teaching the child in a safe and nurturing environment, teachers can nourish the true potential of each student. Making each child feel welcome by showing them that they are happy they are in their class can make a huge difference. Calm and quiet areas can be provided for the children who need an escape. The classroom may be the only place for some children experiencing trauma, like those with an incarcerated parent, to feel safe and supported.

Once the mutual trust and positive relationships are established with the child of an incarcerated parent, it will be critical to set a one-on-one time to talk with the child and provide opportunities to share his/her concerns and feelings. This can occur naturally during play or various open-ended activities that facilitate self-expression (e.g., reading, drawing, writing, puppet show). For example, sitting with the child and reading books about their situation can

help open communication and let them know they are not alone. Make sure to have books for all different family situations as to not single out certain children. Read books about parental incarceration, divorce, death, and different parental figures and relationships. When they feel that a teacher is a safe and trustworthy person to talk to, they are more likely to share their concerns, dreams, and fears. When the time is taken to understand the children, a relationship can be fostered by providing safety and security.

Provide a Predictable, yet Flexible, Routine and Environment. As early childhood educators, we know children thrive on routine and structure, but it becomes even more crucial for a child of an incarcerated parent, due to the lack of stability in their home life. For example, it is helpful to have a daily schedule with visual cues, so the children know what to expect. It has to be in a place where the children can see it at their eye-level. Transitions can be particularly difficult for children who are experiencing instability and chaos at home due to parental incarceration. Teachers can provide advance notice of a transition by singing a song or offering a verbal cue. Having routines to help children prepare to move to the next activity will ease the stress of transition time, as they need time to process their thoughts, wrap up their activity, and switch their focus and attention.

Encourage Both Interdependence and Independence. While providing warm and nurturing care would facilitate the feelings of connections and interdependence, it is also important to foster independence and leadership skills of children of an incarcerated parent. Leadership skills allow children to have control of their lives and the ability to make things happen. Leadership instills confidence, helps children solve problems creatively, and work collaboratively with others. It gives children many opportunities to develop responsibility as well (Brungardt, 1997; Edmonds, 2012; Ren-Etta, 2010). Children with incarcerated parents may lack

opportunities to develop leaderships skills at home but classroom jobs give them an opportunity to hold leadership positions, build their confidence, and have control over situations. Children can lead by becoming the classroom greeter, line leader, or attendance taker. Teachers should inform children of the responsibilities of each classroom job and guide them as they take on that role. Children should have the opportunity to try various jobs within the classroom (Ren-Etta, 2010).

Offer Resources and Means to Meet the Child's Basic Needs. Not only does the school environment offer educational supports, but it also offers comfort in the way of nutritious meals, clothes, school supplies, and other resources. While the school offers these resources for all children these supports are extremely vital for children with incarcerated parents. Teachers make crucial contributions to the development and well-being of children in their classrooms.

Teachers can play a significant role in preventing child abuse or neglect and by supporting children at risk for, or already, experiencing maltreatment by looking for signs of distress in the child (Lloyd, 2019). Merely being a supportive adult in a child's life and a supportive professional in a family's life can enhance the child's resiliency. Teachers can help guide guardians in times of crisis, teach and model positive guidance practices, and refer children and their guardians for additional services and support. Further, teachers can help guardians become more involved in school activities (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018).

Mesosystem

The mesosystem encompasses the child's school and the community. At this age, children spend most of their waking hours at school. The mesosystem is where interactions and relationships occur between the microsystems. The relationships spill over from one environment to another (Marotz & Kupzyk, 2018).

Gather Sufficient Information About Each Family's Needs. A listening ear and a caring face can go a long way in helping families or guardians feel supported by the teacher. Before a teacher can truly connect and teach a child, it is essential to build a relationship of mutual respect and trust. An important place to start is by getting to know the children and their family and understanding their unique life circumstances. One way to do this is by sending home a questionnaire to be completed by the adult in the household.

Inquiring about the child's living arrangements and household size offers insights into the family situation without appearing too invasive through direct questions about the parents. If a child has an incarcerated parent this is a safe place for their guardian to disclose this information. Sometimes writing this information is better for guardians of children with incarcerated parents because they do not have to verbally say what they want to share in front of the child and upset the child. However, some families and guardians may be skeptical of surveys or questionnaires and do not want to share their personal information in writing (even household size). Let these parents know that any information is just for your personal use in the classroom to support them and their child. You could also offer a phone or in person conference, so they do not have to write anything down, but you still get the needed information. The school administration may have more detailed information about the child's living arrangement and current family situation that might be accessible to the teacher from enrollment papers or change of address forms.

Parent-teacher conferences are a great opportunity to communicate; however, they are not always feasible. Communicating with the child's guardian is not just about attending parent-teacher conferences. There are several other ways to stay in touch and to create a positive two-way relationship such as, sending text messages or emails, asking for volunteers in the

classroom, adding comments to a homework notebook, or offering flexible meeting times between the teacher and guardian.

Another way to get to know a child's home life situation and connect to the family is by home visits. Meeting in a classroom can be intimidating and talking over the phone can be distancing and impersonal. Therefore, by having a teacher travel to the student's house, parents or other children's guardians may be more likely to voice their concerns, speak candidly, and let the teacher into their lives. Viewing a child's home environment and what conditions they face can be beneficial and build rapport with the family/guardians. Home visits have been shown to increase student performance, jumpstart parent involvement, reduce discipline problems, and increase overall positive attitudes toward school. If done correctly, a home visit program can give teachers, parents, and children a better opportunity for connection, communication, and collaboration (Graff, 2017).

Be Sensitive and Inclusive When Planning a Family-School Event. Early childhood educators and administrators work together to engage and support the current caretaker of the child of an incarcerated parent. Teachers must recognize and respect differences in family structures by being cognizant of the child's current situation. Instead of having Muffins with Moms or Donuts with Dads, a teacher could have Breakfast with Buddies, to make the event more inclusive for all children, regardless of their home-life situation. Sometimes it might be an older sibling who is able to participate. Family Nights are still important in schools but renaming them as Community Nights should be considered. Encourage all members of the community who play a crucial role with families to attend such as, police officers, fire fighters, and school personnel.

Exosystem

The exosystem of the ecological system encompasses social services and government support systems. The exosystem environments have an indirect effect on the child. School board decisions, social services, and the correctional system are all systems that have an impact on the child (Marotz & Kupzyk, 2018).

Offer Information About Resources and Social Services. At this young age, the teacher or school may need to offer resources for the child or the child's guardian. The school can help them gain access to social services which can assist the child while the parent is incarcerated. A few examples of the social services are clothing closets, donated school supplies, and play dates with other children who also have incarcerated parents (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018). Connecting the child and family with therapeutic support in cases where they are hesitant to speak to the teacher or school representative. Many states offer support for grandparents raising grandchildren or for children with incarcerated parents (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1999). These supports can be as simple as a guide to resources that exist for grandparents to monthly meetings to connect with other grandparents raising grandchildren due to incarceration.

Take Field Trips and Neighborhood Tours. Neighborhood tours are a great way for teachers to learn more about their students. Neighborhood tours can be done with all pertinent school personnel by utilizing a school bus for the tour. The goal of the neighborhood tour is to help teachers gain a better understanding of their implicit bias and their students. Neighborhood tours can show teachers obstacles children face regardless of whether the child comes from an affluent or an economically disadvantaged area. "It makes a teacher think more about those first day of school questions, such as: 'Where did you go on vacation?' or 'How great was your summer?'", as not all children have the same opportunities or experiences (Zalaznick , 2019).

Macrosystem

The macrosystem encompasses the child's culture, ethnicity, and social norms. It is important for the teacher to embrace and celebrate each child's heritage. The macrosystem offers a chance to appreciate the different perspectives children bring to the classroom to make the learning environment meaningful and supportive (Marotz & Kupzyk, 2018).

Reflect on Personal Bias Toward Incarceration and Other Family Adversity. Being aware of social norms appends the macrosystem. Often, we have our own implicit biases about incarcerated parents, which can easily take focus away from the real issues children are facing in the classroom. By maintaining one's focus on the children, teachers develop empathy and understanding of what the children may be experiencing at home.

Create a Classroom That Represents Diversity and Builds a Community. Diversity should be represented throughout the classroom and school through various books, photos, and artifacts. Make your classroom inviting and non-judgmental. Think twice before having an *All About Me* lesson where a parent needs to supply information and family pictures for the activity. Before encouraging photos from home where children may not reside or have access to family photos, consider using pictures from the classroom. Photos can be taken throughout the day of all the exciting learning taking place. You can also offer an alternative activity that would substitute this type of activity. Interview the children for information to include in the classroom community such as their favorite food, favorite color, favorite book, and favorite superhero. This helps children of incarcerated parents by showing them that they can find supports from their classmates, school environment, and in the community. It is also important to build a community in the classroom by involving the support staff, bus drivers, cafeteria personnel, community

members, and all other important people who treat children with respect and kindness to help children experiencing adversity at home feel safe and supported.

Conclusion

Children's experience with parental incarceration disrupts their daily lives; they lose family connections, and it has long lasting damaging effects on a child's emotional security, behaviors, and school performance. It is important to help children recognize, understand, and work through their feelings. A teacher can have a significant impact on a child's life and can help reshape an adverse trajectory already set in motion by offering a safe, supportive, and predictable environment. Ensuring our teachers have the adequate training and knowledge needed to help children with incarcerated parents must come to the forefront. Teachers should remind themselves that they are making an impact by filling a void left by an incarcerated parent. Other community members and organizations need to make collective efforts to support and advocate for children with parents in prison. They can help children overcome the hardships they experience during their parental incarceration by supporting the child and their teacher. As the African proverb says, "It takes a village to raise a child." The entire community must interact with these children for them to experience, and grow, in a safe and healthy environment.

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MANUSCRIPT III

Lessons Learned Inside the Yard: The Impact of Parenting Classes on Incarcerated Mothers

This manuscript is prepared for submission to the peer-reviewed journal *Children and Youth Services Review* and is the third of three manuscripts prepared for a journal-ready doctoral dissertation.

Abstract

With growing public attention to the problem of mass incarceration, many individuals want to know about the vast rise in women's incarceration rate. Particularly concerning, the increase of mothers in prison. For many mothers, the only source of hope and motivation they have while involved in the criminal justice system is the connection with their children. This article demonstrates that educational programs focusing on parenting can help incarcerated mothers renew their parental role upon release from prison. The target audience for this article includes, but is not limited to, correctional facility administrators, family counselors, educators, and anyone with an interest in parenting after prison. This article can also serve as a platform to advocate for quality parenting classes for incarcerated mothers.

Keywords: Incarceration, parenting class, mothers

Lessons Learned Inside the Yard: The Impact of Parenting Classes on Incarcerated Mothers

One of the most shocking calamities our country has witnessed in the last two decades has been the escalation in mass incarceration and the damaging effects families feel for generations to come (Haskins, 2016). Women's incarceration has exploded at a 700% increase in the last two decades (Kaistura, 2019). Most of these women are mothers and are more likely to have custody of their children prior to incarceration, compared to men (Dillion, 2018). This rapid increase in maternal incarceration makes important implications for their role as a parent and their children and family who are left behind.

Incarcerated women, specifically mothers, face countless hardships while in prison. The incarcerated mothers are at risk of losing their children, and they often do during their incarceration (Wildeman, Goldman, Turney, 2018). In addition, they struggle due to lack of contact and communication with family, feelings of isolation, and guilt (Aiello & McQueeney, 2016) as many of their children reside with their grandparents or go into the foster care system (Kids Count, 2016). In addition, the incarcerated mother often portrays herself as an inadequate and incompetent mother who lacks knowledge and parenting skills and is unable to provide for the needs of her children (Coll et al., 1998). This feeling of incompetence as a mother may be, in part, due to the absence of a positive role model and support for parenting. Even after release, the previously incarcerated mothers continue to encounter various obstacles to effectively function as a parent (Easterling, 2012). For example, their low educational levels and criminal records serve as a major barrier in finding employment, which leads to hardships in caring for their children (Haskins, 2016; Women in Prison Project, 2006).

To be better prepared for life after prison the mothers need appropriate education and training (Garcia, 2016). Many correctional facilities provide some type of job training programs

and general education degree (GED) classes to help these mothers prepare for their life after prison. These programs sometimes include parenting classes in an attempt to help alleviate these mothers' stress and improve their parenting skills (Garcia, 2016). However, there are limited studies available that look at both immediate and long-term impacts of programs on mothers in and after prison through in-depth inquires of their perspectives. Thus, the purpose of this case study is to provide a detailed description of the incarcerated mothers' experiences with the parenting class and what impact the class has on them in prison and after their release.

Separation Struggles of Incarcerated Mothers

Mothers in the criminal justice system must leave their children behind with their family or in foster care systems (Easterling, 2012). Being separated and concerned about the well-being of their children are considered the most damaging aspects of living in prison for women (Wildeman, Goldman, Turney, 2018). The research found that separation from children is generally a greater hardship for women than for men who are the primary caregivers (Mumola, 2010). For many incarcerated mothers their relationship, or lack thereof, with their children can have a profound effect on how they function in prison (Aiello & McQueeney, 2016). Negativism, manipulation, rule-breaking, and fighting between incarcerated women are signs of "resistance for survival" in response to the grief, loss, shame, and guilt they feel about their role as a mother (Coll et al. 1998).

This struggle with separation is often exacerbated by a lack of contact with their children in prison (Kabel & Cowhig, 2018). According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2018), fifty-four percent of mothers in state prisons report receiving no personal visits with their children since their admission. Geographical distance to the prison, lack of transportation, and an unwillingness or an inability of the current caregiver to bring a child to a correctional facility are

the major reasons for a lack of visits. In some cases, the forced separation between mother and child with minimal contact results in the permanent termination of the parent-child relationship (Aiello & McQueeney, 2016).

Research shows that preserving a child's relationship with their incarcerated mother benefits both the mother and the child (Poehlmann, 2005). Meeting with and staying connected to a child can add comfort and bring pleasure, and knowing the child is doing well can dispel uncertainty and lessen the guilt for the mother (Poehlmann, Shlafer, Maes, & Hanneman, 2008). Regular visits and communication may also serve as a reminder to the mother to work toward reuniting with her child through self-improvement opportunities. For many women, the only source of hope and motivation they have while incarcerated is the connection with their children (Mumola, 2010). Parental incarceration is not an isolated event. It is a process that unfolds over time even after release. These incarcerated mothers will benefit from support and resources that assist them in preserving their relationships and connections with their children and family.

Opportunities in Prison: Supporting to Regain Competence as a Parent

The majority of correctional facilities allow faith-based and community-based programs to fill a void in the facility and help incarcerated mothers maintain connections and relationships with their children. Some examples include recorded book readings from the parent to the child, Christmas gifts given to the children on behalf of the mothers, and play dates arranged for when children are on breaks from school (Sharp, 2003). These opportunities help maintain and encourage the strong parent-child bond, but do not address preparing the mothers to parent after prison.

Other programs at some correctional facilities are offered to help incarcerated mothers develop parenting skills and positive attitudes toward parenting (Loper & Tuerk, 2011; Wilson et

al., 2010). They were designed for mothers with children ranging in ages from infants to eighteen years of age (Lovell, et al, 2020). The programs range from two to ninety hours of instruction. The content these classes cover include anger management, communication, child development, nurturing children through reading and play, non-violent discipline techniques, adult development, transition planning, and co-parenting (Armstrong et al., 2017; Correctional Education Association, 2016; Loper & Tuerk, 2011; Lovell et al, 2020; Newman et al., 2011; Tremblay & Sutherland, 2017). They use a variety of teaching modalities and delivery methods such as lectures, small group discussions, role play, handouts, and videos (Loper & Tuerk, 2011; Wildeman, Goldman, & Turney, 2018; Wilson et al., 2010).

However, the quality and the rigor of the curriculum greatly vary and the intensity and lengths of the classes are often minimal (e.g., two to three brief sessions, Armstrong et al., 2017; Loper & Tuerk, 2011; Lovell et al, 2020). Qualifications of the facilitators differ from student interns to highly trained instructors (Correctional Education Association, 2016). It is uncommon that these courses are taught by a qualified instructor who has a strong background and expertise in child development and early childhood education (Correctional Education Association, 2016).

There are a number of studies investigating the impact of parenting programs conducted in prisons targeting mothers (Armstrong et al., 2017; Loper & Tuerk, 2011; Newman et al., 2011; Tremblay & Sutherland, 2017; Troy et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2010). These studies were all conducted since 2010 and the majority used a quantitative research method (i.e., survey). The utilization of pre- and post-assessments was the most common form of data collection for analysis. Several positive impacts of the parenting class reported from these studies include improvements in parenting attitude (Tremblay & Sutherland, 2017), parenting skills (Armstrong et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2011), parenting knowledge, parent-child relationships (Armstrong et al., 2017; Tremblay & Sutherland, 2017), and parenting behavior (Tremblay & Sutherland, 2017).

There are a few exemplar programs and evaluation studies. For example, a parenting class, called Parenting Inside Out, focused on cognitive behavioral therapy to reduce emotional reactivity to stressful situations (Loper & Tuerk, 2011). Group discussions and video vignettes

were part of the main delivery method. The class was facilitated by clinical psychology doctoral students and met for a total of 18 hours across five sessions. This class promotes strategies that allow mothers to maintain their parental identity despite their crimes, incarceration, and separation from their children. As a result of this class, visitation stress was reduced as well as levels of parenting stress. Another program (Miller et al., 2014), Parenting While Incarcerated, is similar to Parenting Inside Out in the content, intensity, delivery methods, and target outcomes. Parenting, addiction, communication, relationships, self-esteem, emotions, and budgeting were the core curriculum concepts. Results include the improvement of the parent-child relationship, a higher level of self-esteem for the mothers, and an increase of contact with their children (Miller et al., 2014).

To address the urgent needs of mothers trying to parent in prison, high-quality parenting classes are essential. They need a sufficient number of sessions, a qualified expert as an instructor, and rigorous studies that examine the impact of these classes. However, with a few exceptions, the extant classes are somewhat limited and lacking because of the unavailability of highly qualified instructors, short course duration, and the lack of rigor in course content. There is a need for high-quality parenting programs to help incarcerated mother's transition to life after prison and improve their parenting.

Description of Parenting Class for the Present Study

The parenting class described in the study has many elements of high-quality programming that are also tailored for this unique group of mothers. This class is a three-hour credit-bearing college course offered to a group of twenty-five mothers. It met for sixteen weeks, three hours per week. The course is designed to explore parenting philosophies, styles, and techniques as well as decisions, responsibilities, and issues related to parent-child relationships.

The author of the present study served as an instructor of the course and taught the same group in three other classes. She holds a master's degree in early childhood education and has taught various child development and early childhood education classes in higher education for thirteen years. These mothers stay with the same group over multiple courses as a cohort.

There were several key features and strategies used for this class. Modeling was frequently used through live or recorded demonstrations of parenting behaviors since the mothers may have lacked a positive maternal role model. Roleplay allowed the mothers to practice skills in a safe environment since many had little or no contact with their children during this time. The course consisted of a balance of lecturing and hands-on assignments, including peer discussions, small group collaboration, video viewing, and whole-group activities. Homework was essential to allow the mothers time away from class to reflect, work through the textbook, and do the required readings. Weekly reflections of learned knowledge were a class requirement, which also served as an assessment to assist the instructor on how the content was received.

The Present Study

In response to the rising number of incarcerated mothers, more parenting classes, support programs, and studies on the impact of these programs became available. However, the current literature on this topic has a few important limitations. First, as mentioned above, there is a lack of high-quality parenting classes available for this population or studies showing their impact. Second, many of the existing studies examined the program effectiveness, using a pre- and post-assessment design, but they collected data mostly through a questionnaire with a predetermined set of targeted outcomes. Third, most previous studies investigated the immediate impact of the class and rarely explored its long-term impact on their actual parenting after prison. There are also limited studies available that use a case study paradigm to capture the rich stories of the

incarcerated mothers' experiences with the parenting class and its impact on them and their parenting.

This case study was designed to examine the incarcerated mothers' experiences with a high-quality parenting class and its impact on them in and after prison from a variety of data sources. The intent of the present study is to allow the voices and perspectives of this sensitive and silenced population to be heard, which would rarely be captured in a survey study. It presents a realistic and contextually rich situation that provides the researcher a glimpse into the topic of parenting in prison, and after prison. The research questions include: what experiences did the incarcerated mothers have from the parenting class they attended in prison? and what impact does the parenting class have on the incarcerated mothers in prison and after release from prison?

Method

This study used a case study method for the in-depth inquiry on how recently released mothers feel about their current parenting practices in regard to taking a parenting course while incarcerated. This method permits the researcher to answer "how" and "why" type questions, while taking into consideration how a phenomenon is influenced by the context within which it is situated (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A case study will give allowance for research inquiry that examines a real-life contemporary phenomenon, in this case parenting after prison, by exploring situations that have no clear set of outcomes (Yin, 2009). This research approach allows the researcher to view and interpret the incarcerated mothers' experiences with the parenting class from a variety of sources (Tellis, 1997). Individual interviews with the mothers, artifacts (e.g., self-reflection, class discussion assignment), questionnaires, and parent logs were collected over time were used to gain the data needed for this research study.

Participants and Settings

Utilizing convenience sampling twelve mothers, who were previously incarcerated, were invited to the study, all of whom were willing to participate. These mothers were former students of the researcher while they were incarcerated, and were contacted for research after they release from prison. Among them, six mothers met the following criteria the researcher established for this study (see Table 1). The criteria for inclusion encompassed the following specifications: (a) recently released from prison, and (b) took a parenting class with the researcher while incarcerated.

The participants spent an average of six years incarcerated and separated from their children. All the mothers were convicted of a drug-related crime. The majority of the mothers reported they were raised by a single parent, raised in poverty, and their highest education level was a high school diploma or equivalent. They had been released from prison within the last two years, ranging from six to fifteen months, which provided a window of time to capture the reunification process between mother and child. Half of the participants identified as White and the rest of the participants identified as Native Americans. The average age of these mothers is 35 and their age ranged from 32 to 42 years with the majority of the participants having three children, ranging in age from 7 to 25 years of age. The participants have chosen their own pseudonyms for this study. Both Amy and Journee have two children. Bambi, Chevelle, Denise, and Dona have three children each.

Table 1
Demographic Information on Participants

Name (pseudonym)	Race/Ethnicity	Mothers Age	Number of Children	Ages of children	Mother's Years Spent in Prison

Amy	Caucasian/White	34	2	8 & 10	5
Bambi	Native American	33	3	8, 11, 13	4
Chevelle	Caucasian/White	32	3	8,10, 11	6
Denise	Native American	36	3	11, 3, 17	7
Dona	Caucasian/White	42	3	20,22,25	10
Journee	Native American	34	2	16 & 8	6

Data Collection and Procedures

As part of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process, the researcher personally contacted the mothers who fit the criteria by email. A consent form was given to each of the six qualified mothers who were interested in participating in the study. Four major data sources collected from the participants for the case study consist of a questionnaire on participants' demographic and background information, weekly self-reflection assignments, individual interviews, and parent logs, which are described below in detail.

Demographic and background information was obtained through a Qualtrics questionnaire administered before the initial interview. Each participant completed the questionnaire using a link sent to them via email. Weekly self-reflections were completed after class instruction and submitted to the instructor at the end of the course. The self-reflections were prompted by the content covered in class that night. For example, one class session covered future goals. The prompt asked the mothers what their hopes and dreams were for their children. The logic behind the self-reflections was two-fold; extend the participants' thought processes to revolve around

after prison expectations and to serve as an assessment for the instructor to ensure content was delivered in the intended way so that the mothers were able to make a meaningful connection.

The purpose of the interview was to collect information from participants to understand the impact the parenting course made while parenting after prison. This is a topic that cannot be directly observed but where interviews are an appropriate method of data collection (Yin, 2006, 2009, and 2011). The participants were interviewed twice, each interview ranging from one to two hours in length and were conducted two to four weeks apart. The two interviews allowed the researcher to gain useful insight from the first interview to then form questions that complemented the participant's answers during the second interview. The initial interview utilized a set of questions predetermined by the researcher.

The majority of the questions for the second interview were formed from the initial interview responses as a follow-up. Each interview location was determined by the participant's current residency. The interviews took place in local restaurants or coffee shops, close to each participant's home or place of employment, and where the participant felt most comfortable. The researcher ensured the interviews were conducted in low traffic areas and kept as private and confidential as possible. The semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded to ensure that the participant's stories were not construed by possible errors in written form. The majority of interview questions related to their experiences with the parenting class, what they learned through the parenting course, and the possible impacts the course had on their parenting practices in and after prison. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for developing codes, categories, and themes.

The mothers were also asked to keep a parent log for three weeks in which they documented personal reflections on their experiences as a parent and their children's responses. They were

asked to respond to the log at least two days every week. All participants returned the completed logs, with the majority completing at least four entries. The researcher provided the parenting log notebooks and writing prompts with open-ended questions to each of the participants. The writing prompts included: (a) a parenting method they use to help them bond with their child, and (b) an open-ended prompt where the mother can discuss what is on their mind regarding their children and/or their parenting.

Data Analysis

This study used a variety of techniques for data collection to provide rich description and detail (Merriam, 2009) that is suitable for a case study. Data from the in-depth interviews, questionnaire responses, self-reflections, and parent logs were transcribed verbatim and entered in a password-protected spreadsheet. This helped with sorting and organizing the vast amount of information that was obtained from the participants. Keeping the research question in mind, level one analysis utilized open coding for each of the interview questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Level two analysis included re-examining and collapsing codes. This process allowed the researcher to identify emerging categories and themes. Level three analysis examined all the themes to make sense of the data and ensure that it reflected the story being told. The three-step analysis was followed on the additional three forms of data.

Using multiple sources allowed for cross-verification, helping to make meaning while triangulating the data (Bazeley, 2013). Triangulation of interviews, questionnaires, self-reflection, and the mother's log occurred during the data analysis process. Triangulating the data minimized any bias that could have transpired within the conclusions or findings. Data was compared to see if the inferences drawn from one type of data were comparable with those

obtained in other types of data (Bazeley, 2013). Triangulation also occurred by connecting the research back to the existing body of literature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As mentioned above, since the researcher was formerly their instructor, it is important to safeguard the ethics throughout the study (Patton, 2002). A relationship was established between the mothers and the researcher while the researcher was their instructor for the parenting class. This relationship helped the participants feel comfortable to share their experiences. However, there was concern about the potential bias that would influence the researcher's view of the participants' experiences based on her former relationships with them. She was fully aware of this potential bias and tried to be careful when interviewing and interpreting the results. She also carefully gathered the data from multiple sources to minimize the bias and assure the accuracy of the findings. In addition, to obtain a more objective and balanced view, the researcher participated in peer debriefing meetings throughout the study and discussed a data analysis process in detail with fellow doctoral students and faculty who have expertise in qualitative research methods.

Findings and Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the mothers' experiences with a high-quality parenting class and how the course impacted them as people and parents. This study contributes to the field by examining the immediate and long-term impacts the parenting class had on the incarcerated mothers in and after prison. The case study utilized a variety of data sources such as self-reflections, interviews, and parent logs to capture the voice and perspectives of this sensitive and silenced group of incarcerated mothers. In general, the incarcerated mothers who participated in this study had a positive experience with the parenting class and it proved to be impactful, not only with their parenting, but also, with personal growth even after prison.

Through a series of data analysis, patterns and themes between the data sources were identified. Five major themes emerged from the analysis: (1) rebuilding relationships with family through self-reflection, (2) healing and therapeutic process, (3) developing a useful toolkit for parenting, (4) empowering self and regaining confidence as a parent, and (5) continuing challenges and needs for more supports. The results from each of the five themes are described in detail below (see Table 2).

Table 2
Overarching Themes

Overarching Theme	Categories	Description
Rebuilding Relationships with Family through Self-reflection	Difficulty facing the past Recognized the importance of self-reflection Parent-child relationship	• Learned past parental influences were not always positive or healthy • Newly formed understanding and appreciation for their own mothers • Improved relationships with children
Healing and Therapeutic Process	Safe environment for sharing Acknowledging past failures and moving forward Formed new friendships and support from classmates that continue outside of the yard Knowing you are not alone and shared same struggles and concerns as peers	• Personal healing from past experiences gave mothers hope • Instructor created a non-judgmental classroom setting • Felt understood and valued by peers • Extended peer network and support after prison • A sense of belonging and camaraderie by sharing similar experiences with peers
Developing Useful Toolkit for Parenting	Clearer expectations for age-appropriate behavior Improved lines of communication Better understanding of children's feelings and actions	• Participants gained valuable knowledge related to the basics of child development (including developmentally appropriate but realistic expectations for child)

	Do not take things for granted as a mother	• Improved relationships with children through communication with the help scenarios for role playing • Improved parenting skills (including flexible and positive behavior guidance techniques)
Empowering Self and Regaining Confidence as a Parent	New view of self and why it is important to care for oneself Changes in parental attitude	• Enhanced sense of empowerment and confidence to not take things for granted • Learned importance of self-care • Motivated to re-learn how to be a good parent
Continuing Challenges and Needs for Supports	Transitioning from Prisoner to Parent Lack of supports	• Life after prison is more challenging than expected • Needs for continued mentoring and support for their parenting role • Needs for other types of support

Rebuilding Relationships with Family through Self-Reflection

All the mothers who participated in the study reflected on their own experiences of being parented, realizing the significant influences of the past on their approach to parenting and the challenge of breaking this intergenerational cycle. They mentioned that in the beginning, it was not easy for them to look back on their own issues and their experiences in early childhood or before incarceration. It was often very negative and painful to recall. The majority were raised by a single parent, lived in an impoverished household, felt neglected, experienced substance abuse, and had strained relationships with their parents and siblings. None of them had an adult figure as a role model for parenting. Chevelle stated how difficult and distressing this process was for her.

> *It was hard initially because I was forced to look at things that happened when I was young. I had to resolve some of my own issues and that was hard for me to do. So, I was*

able to learn to get over my childhood, so I'm not reliving my childhood through my kids. It's hard to break the cycle and do something different.

The course offered opportunities through self-reflection and class discussions for the mothers to reflect on their relationships with family members, especially a mother, and their childhood memories. Through multiple class sessions with these opportunities, the participants realized how important it is to reflect on the adversity they experience and the mistakes they have made. They learned that without in-depth reflection and efforts to overcome these struggles, they cannot move on and rebuild their life. They began to make efforts to repair their previously broken relationships with their family. When mothers can maintain or create contacts with people "outside the yard" it can help them stay connected to goals and opportunities beyond their prison sentence.

In particular, all the participants realized the important role their own mother played since they had been incarcerated. This led to a dramatic change in their view and relationships with their mother. Each participant revealed during the initial interview that they did not have a strong bond with their mother in the past and felt the absence of a mother figure in their childhood. However, during their incarceration their mothers became the primary caregiver for their children, arranged a place for them to stay once released (i.e., five out of six moved in with their mother), and provided financial support until they began working. The reflection and discussion in class provided an opportunity to reinforce their recognition and appreciation of their mother.

All six of the mothers commonly reported an improved relationship with their children as an outcome of taking the parenting class and going through in-depth self-reflections on their parenting role. The mothers stated that they improved relationships and communication with their child, which included their ability to empathize with their child, show affection, and provide encouragement and praise. These findings of the impact of the parenting class on

positive relationships with their children and families are similar to the findings of the previous studies (Armstrong et al., 2017; Miller et al, 2014; Tremblay & Sutherland, 2017). The previous studies targeted building positive relationships with children as a key outcome of the class and found improvement in this area as a result of incarcerated mothers taking a parenting course. The present study added to the literature by discovering the impact of the parenting class not only on rebuilding relationships with their children but also repairing past strained relationships with their family, especially their mothers through self-reflection.

Therapeutic and Healing Process: Understanding and Feeling Understood

The majority of participating mothers mentioned that the parenting class they took was more than a class. It appeared to serves as a therapeutic and healing process through finding self-compassion and acceptance. The prison environment is cold and harsh. It is not usually a place that welcomes vulnerability or values the sharing of feelings. Thus, many of the mothers were hesitant to open-up emotionally and embrace the opportunity to disclose their vulnerability by sharing their most personal thoughts and feelings, especially about their past where their children were concerned.

However, the positive attitudes of the course instructor and connections to their peers seemed to make a difference. The instructor's supportive and non-judgmental approach was the most frequently cited reason why this process was perceived as feeling therapeutic and healing. Amy noted, "*She doesn't have one accusing bone in her body and she builds up your confidence"*. The instructor provided clear guidance to manage and express their emotional struggles within the groups and facilitated trust and relationships between the mothers. Two of the participating mothers valued the instructor's ability to serve as a positive role model, emphasize their maternal role, and instill hope by being open, understanding, and accepting of

them as who they are. Dona expressed her appreciation of the instructor for understanding her situation by saying,

> *You couldn't ask for a better class. Mrs. Kim is a mother herself, I mean, that means a lot. How can you tell somebody how it feels to be a mother if you're not a mother? So, you have to be a mother to know the feeling, and what we go through, what we feel like on a day-to-day basis that we can't be with our kids.*

Four of the mothers also reported the value of sharing experiences with the other mothers and being provided with an outlet to vent in a safe environment. They perceived it as helpful to have a place to vent about their challenges with children and found solace that others were going through similar struggles as incarcerated mothers. These mothers felt understood and reassured, normalized the difficulties they were experiencing, and realized all mothers make mistakes and were afforded an opportunity to learn from other incarcerated mothers. This experience and newly gained perspective not only brought much comfort and self-acceptance but also served as an opportunity to build mutual reliance and a strong sense of community. Journee mentioned, "*You felt like you were there for each other, and you talked about what you tried and what they tried. We probably learned a lot from each other."*

Further, half of the participants reported that they were able to reconnect with their peers after release. They learned that they lived close enough to stay in close contact, meet up regularly, and develop connections and friendships extended from the parenting class. This close tie with peers who share similar challenges and interests was particularly helpful during the transition to the after-prison life where they usually lose all connections to their former friends and feel isolated. Having an established peer support system became an invaluable asset and comfort for these mothers.

These findings are somewhat consistent with those of Loper and Tuerk, (2011) who reported improvement in incarcerated women's relationships and reduced levels of stress by

sharing and contributing in class. Bell and Cornwell (2015) also reported mothers having significant improvements in self-esteem, reduced levels of stress, and increased forgiveness. The findings of the present study (e.g., the significance of peer support, a non-judgmental and supportive environment) were not targeted outcomes of this parenting class, which is also the case in most of the previous parenting classes. Thus, it would not be able to be captured through a survey study with a clear set of targeted outcomes. The present study with the case study method added novel information to the current literature.

Developing Useful Toolkit for Parenting: Relevant Content with Flexible Strategies

All mothers who participated in the parenting class reported that they learned a great deal about how to be a good parent, including knowledge about child development and a variety of parenting techniques and guidance strategies, which became a helpful toolkit to use with their children. The majority of the participants commented that the content in the class was helpful to understand child development and improve their parenting skills. They also noted they have a deeper understanding of their children's behaviors and needs and age-appropriate expectations for their children.

> *I think adults have this misconception that they can speak to children any way that they like. That they don't have feelings, you know, and I think that has been helpful for me, just to recognize that sometimes they need to talk about things as well. And it is often harder for kids to talk about things because they don't have the vocabulary, they don't have the words to express the way that they are feeling, and that it is up to me to try and help them express how they are feeling, you know. And I think that more than anything else has been a benefit.*

Almost all the participants shared they particularly valued the delivery approach of the parenting class that was collaborative and non-directive. Strategies introduced were flexible and adaptable to meet the specific needs of parents attending the course. The instructor discovered early on that the traditional course needed to be tailored for this specific group of mothers. For

example, the importance of holding flexible and realistic expectations for changing old ways of thinking about what a parent should be was emphasized in class, which was perceived as helpful, as noted by Amy. "*I think it helps if you have realistic expectations. I don't intend to change my kids in everything, but to improve some things, and those things are improving*".

The way in which the mothers made the lessons learned from the parenting course work for them varied significantly. Some described the continued use of course resources, whereas for others, there was a process of adapting taught material to make it suitable for them and their children. Regardless, the majority of the participants agreed that the content on behavioral guidance and role play as a delivery method were particularly helpful in understanding and improving their parenting role. Two mothers mentioned that it was most helpful to learn the content about behavioral guidance. They emphasized learning the difference between punishment and discipline to manage their children's undesirable behavior, and the importance of listening to their child. Regarding the effective delivery method, three of the mothers perceived the role play as beneficial in facilitating them not only to understand others' perspectives but also to practice essential parenting skills in a safe environment. They gained knowledge from their instructor and peer modeling on how to react to certain situations through the role play activities.

There are a number of studies with similar findings that used role play as a strategy to help the mothers negotiate parenting skills and understand the need for positive guidance techniques (Armstrong et al., 2017; Loper & Tuerk, 2011; Newman et al., 2011; Tremblay & Sutherland, 2017; Troy et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2010). Kennon et al. (2009)'s study offered related results that incarcerated mothers appeared to be motivated to gain an understanding of what children need after attending parenting classes. Mothers in a study conducted by Collica-

Cox & Furst (2019) conveyed that they might change the way they discipline their children because of what they learned by taking a parenting class while incarcerated.

Empowering Self and Regaining Confidence as a Parent

Parenting classes highlighted incarcerated mothers' need to confront their wrongdoings and the pain they had inevitably caused their children. Three of the mothers stated that taking this class resulted in an increase in self-awareness, empowerment, and regaining confidence in their ability as a parent. Reclaiming their roles as mothers offered confidence in their newfound knowledge of parenting. The parenting class provided various opportunities to reflect on and redefine self-identity as a parent through positive feedback and encouragement, which may have helped them build a sense of self-worth and higher self-esteem. The encouragement and support from peers also contributed to personal growth for the incarcerated mother. In this process, three of the mothers also recognized a critical need for self-care to sustain the positive outlook and motivation to be a good parent. As Bambi puts it,

> *I think my biggest hurdle has been looking at my kids and being able to say I'm okay. I do good things for you. I may not be perfect, but I am okay. I think that for me that was the biggest hurdle. Just to get over the fact that I am not a bad mother. I just felt as well that it made me recognize that I was a human being as well, you know. And I have needs and requirements as well, whereas before I was trying to be the super-duper wonderful parent, trying to do everything without actually paying any attention to myself. I think I recognized that, yes, I can still be a good parent but still look after myself as well. So, I think recognizing that was good for me.*

Morash & Schram (2002) remind us of what these mothers often face when trying to reinvent their mothering roles after incarceration. Having a new sense of purpose and being responsible for their children again increased feelings of empowerment. Similar to previous research (Clarke-Stewart, 2001; Herrera, 2017), these women plan to continue to pursue personal growth opportunities, leading to higher self-esteem. Easterling (2012) discusses how hard it is for mothers to become parents again after being released from prison. The most important lesson

the mothers in this study appeared to have learned is to not take parenting for granted. Their children were their main source of motivation to improve themselves while incarcerated and to focus on renewing their role as a mother.

Continuing Challenges and Needs for More Supports

Even though the parenting class had positive results for the mothers, many additional hardships continue to exist for them. A major finding indicated that all participating mothers experienced various challenges adjusting to their life outside of prison as a person and a parent. The majority of them mentioned that the transition to their life and parenting role after prison is more difficult than expected. The mothers mentioned waiting for their release with anticipation and excitement to reunite with their children and extended family. Some of the perceptions were short lived due to unanticipated challenges. Bambi and Amy both wrote in their parent log that there are days they wish they were back in prison due to the difficulties of adjusting to motherhood and life after prison. Bambi wrote in her parenting log,

> *It is hard to adjust to life outside of prison and all the demands I have on myself. While I was incarcerated, I knew my children were being cared for and were safe. Now, I have all that responsibility of keeping them safe and happy. It is a lot to process.*

Sime and Sheridan (2014) explain that recently released mothers who are living in poverty struggle to respond to the day-to-day needs of their children. This indicates a need for continued and additional supports for both parenting and their transition to the after-prison life. The mothers expressed their need for additional supports after prison. There are some studies (Easterling, 2012; Shalfer & Pehlmann, 2010) that uncover challenges including disadvantages educationally, economically, and socially which further perpetuates continuing hardships after prison (Vishner & Travis, 2003). Previous studies (Coates, 2015; Visher & Mallik-Kane, 2007) show that women released from correctional facilities receive minimal preparation and

inadequate assistance and resources, which makes their reentry into communities challenging due to having a criminal conviction.

Several previous studies also acknowledged the importance of ongoing and continued supports for these mothers' adjustment and parenting (Allen, Flaherty, & Ely, 2010; Mapson, 2013; Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 1999). There is a need for ongoing community resources and supports outside prison life. These are imperative to a successful integration back into family-life after incarceration (Allen, Flaherty, & Ely, 2010; Mapson, 2013). In particular, informal social bonds (e.g., faith-based organizations, law abiding neighbors, families, communities) are found to be the strongest predictor of overcoming post incarceration challenges such as committing a crime (Petersilia, 2003). Without strong support in the community to help negotiate the rules and regulations of public agencies, many mothers can quickly recidivate (Mapson, 2013).

Limitations

There are a few limitations of the present study including the relationship between the instructor and mothers. The relationship between the instructor and the mothers can be viewed as both a limitation and an asset. It is possible that the mothers might only share positive experiences with the parenting class because they did not want to disappoint the instructor/researcher by sharing parenting failures during the interviews. The mothers may not have wanted to express any negative components about the shortcomings of the parenting class. Secondly, the small convenience sample of mothers was a limitation. A larger sample would allow the researcher to understand if the majority of mothers parenting abilities were impacted by taking the parenting class. Thirdly, a longitudinal study following the participants for the next two to four years would offer a window into their ability to adjust to their mothering role after

prison. The longitudinal study would address some of the challenges encountered by the mothers to see if the mothers were able to overcome these hardships.

Implications

The findings of the present study regarding parental experiences during and post-incarceration have important implications for practice and policy. There is a growing consensus about the need to address the multifaceted problems of mass incarceration in this nation. Implications for services in the planning and delivery of parenting courses include ensuring high-quality instructors, content tailored to meet the specific needs of parents in prison, a sensitivity to parental adversity, and the availability of ongoing support following release. Increased funding on federal and state levels is imperative to ensure every incarcerated mother has the opportunity to take the course and receive the supports she needs to recover from their past and become a self-sufficient citizen and parent. Providing ongoing support and mentoring as a follow-up to the parenting class such as job training opportunities or community-based support including, support groups for single mothers, mothers dealing with past trauma, or mothers struggling with addictions are critical.

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APPENDIX A: PROSPECTUS

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

PARENTING AFTER PRISON: A MATERNAL APPROACH

A PROSPECTUS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

KIMBERLY DAWN PHILLIPS

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PARENTING AFTER PRISON: A MATERNAL APPROACH

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

BY

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Abstract

A growing body of research supports the importance of acknowledging children suffer adverse conditions when a father is incarcerated, yet limited studies have taken into account the effects when a mother is incarcerated. Women are increasingly becoming the heads of single parent led

homes. To a large extent, they are responsible for supporting, nurturing, and educating their children. This study will examine how a mother transitions from being a prisoner to getting a second chance to parent. Case studies will provide a qualitative analysis of perceptions regarding how the mothers feel they are parenting with newfound knowledge gained before being released.

Keywords: incarceration, mothers, parenting

Chapter 1: Introduction

Millions of children are suffering from their parent's prison sentences and our nation's tough on crime practices (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016).

"Children feel the absence of a parent in jail, even if they weren't sharing a home. They feel it when people whisper at school or at church. They feel it when the refrigerator is bare, when they

move multiple times, and every night when they go to bed wondering what happened or what they did to deserve not having a parent at home anymore."

(Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016 p. 1)

Children with incarcerated mothers are put into this situation by no fault of their own. Despite this fact they often suffer the most when a parent is incarcerated. This is because many children do not understand what happened and may have no contact with their mother for a long time, if at all. Deciding on how to parent after prison brings a crucial realization that many mothers will not get the opportunity to test their newfound parenting styles. Two-thirds of women reoffend and are rearrested within three years of being released (Durose, Cooper, Snyder, 2014). This study will discuss what steps are taken to be reunited with their children such as living arrangements, transportation, employment opportunities, and what obstacles, if any, do mothers have to overcome to begin to parent their children after prison.

Research Problem

Historically, research has focused on incarcerated fathers. There have been studies done on fathers in prison, fathers' relationships with their children during and after their time served, fathers' reentry, and the support that formerly incarcerated fathers receive. However, there is no such research for incarcerated mothers, specifically focusing on parenting after prison. Sharp (2014) suggests that mothers being imprisoned was too harsh for many people to consider studying. Therefore, there is limited research on women's incarceration and parenting after prison from the mother's perspective. Women, specifically mothers, who are incarcerated face countless hardships prior to beginning their prison sentence. These hardships include untreated mental health issues, living with abuse or past abuse, and lack of a high school diploma (Sharp,

2014). As a result of the dramatic increase in the number of women offenders, there is a need for strategies that are gender-specific and community based (Mapson, 2013).

While in prison, mothers do not carry out their sentences in isolation; their children end up sharing their sentence (Sharp, 2014). There are multiple obstacles faced by their children. An obstacle that the children face is struggling to function in society with a mother in prison. Performance in school, social and emotional stressors, living situations, and trust issues are barriers faced by children of an incarcerated parent (Storm & Storm 2011).

Currently, the trend is turning, and mothers are becoming incarcerated at a higher rate than fathers. National data provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2016) reveals that the average incarcerated mother is in her mid-twenties, single, has one to three children, and these mothers typically come from a single-parent or broken home.

Statistically, half of these mother's family members are incarcerated, and she is likely a high school drop-out who was unemployed at the time of her arrest (Mapson, 2013). It is more common for a father to have a place to return home after prison than a mother, as many men have a significant other waiting for their return. The majority of incarcerated mothers are single, and their children live with relatives or in the foster care system when the mom enters prison. Mothers are three times more likely than fathers to have been the only parent in the household at the start of their sentence, making it even more difficult for the mother and child to be reunited after the mothers release due to having to re-establish a home (Mumola, 2000). Upon release, mothers must begin to rebuild their lives in order to gain custody of their children.

Research Purpose

One of the most significant calamities our country has witnessed in the last two decades has been the escalation in mass incarceration and the damaging effects families feel for

generations to come (Haskins, 2016). Reuniting mothers with their children and how they parent after prison is the main focus of this research. This focus cannot be reached or even considered until the mother has regained trust from her children by being able to provide for and support them. Often males make more money when they are released due to labor intensive jobs and not having the burden of trying to set up a home while being the sole provider for the children, as compared to single mothers. Trying to find gainful employment proves a struggle with recently released mothers. With minimal education, a criminal record, and especially a lack of transportation in a rural state these factors become burdens and stressors to the mother (Sharp, 2014).

Sime and Sheridan (2014) explain that parents living in poverty struggle with finding ways to respond to the day-to-day needs of their children. Feeding, clothing, supporting their children's development, are a constant worry and challenge. Having a criminal past, living in poverty, and experiencing negative emotions are barriers that incarcerated mothers must overcome before their confidence as a parent can be repaired. No matter how bad that parent's action may have been, whether their involvement was great or absent in that child's life, many children still want a relationship with their mother after prison.

The purpose of this research is to describe the reunification process and explore how mothers are parenting after they are released from prison. Four overarching questions include:

1. What was the mother's reunification process and timeline to reconnect with her children?
2. How is parenting different now than it was before prison?
3. What obstacles do mothers face after prison in their efforts to be an effective parent?
4. Based on those obstacles, what support/resources/information would have benefited the mothers in becoming a more effective parent?

Conceptual Framework

Looking at this phenomenon of parenting after prison through the theoretical frameworks of Bowlby (1969) and Bronfenbrenner (2001), mothers learning to succeed after prison can be a barrier in itself. Past research (Bowlby, 1988) has proven, children are adversely impacted by their mothers' incarceration. They develop difficulties with attachment to others, and it can lead to mental health and relationship issues; even leading to a life of crime (Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001). When a child's mother is incarcerated, they depend upon the outer levels of the bioecological system to provide the care and development they need. Inter-relationships which shape development include but are not limited to the people, process, context, and time that impact environmental influences (Bronfenbrenner, 2001).

Bowlby's Attachment Theory

Separation, loss, and maternal deprivation (Bowlby, 1982) in the early years of life can impact a child so much that they may never form healthy attachments. According to Bowlby (1982), "attachment behavior is any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world (p.664)." Children who experience attachment issues often have difficulty learning to trust peers and adults, creating unfulfilled needs (Belsky, 2002). There is an expanse of harsh effects that can happen when the mother enters the prison system (Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001).

Behavioral issues, depression, anxiety, and issues with trust (Storm & Storm, 2011) are the most damaging effects. Bowlby believed anxiety was created when the mother was absent from the child (Bowlby, 1969). The mother was the child's safety, his/her escape from upsetting experiences, and a happy place. When the mother was absent from the child, the child did not

have a safe place to retreat when frightened. Bowlby's belief was that young children experienced mourning and grief when their mothers were away from them (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Children who have these difficulties will need help learning to trust and connect with others (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1989). Psychologist

Mary Ainsworth added her own take on attachment theory by formulating the concept of maternal sensitivity to infant signals and its role in the development of infant-mother attachment patterns (Brethertond, 1992). A mother's meaningful behavior patterns with her infant builds a secure attachment that is critical to the baby's social-emotional development (Bowlby, 1982).

Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991) focused their careers on furthering a deeper understanding of infant/adult relationships and the impact of caring. The developed attachment theory provided valuable information to those caring for children about how relational bonds form between young children and their caregivers. Sensitive care fosters feelings of safety in young children, preparing and encouraging children to explore the world around them. A child who can trust that a caregiver will be there if a danger or perceived threat arises feels a greater freedom to explore than a child who does not trust that help will come when dangers intensify. Every encounter a young child has with the world around her, especially the people living in it, has an impact on her development (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Development

In Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development, children develop in different systems, all nested within one another. Bronfenbrenner's (2000) model shows how diverse influences affect the child's development. From the child's inner-circle of family to the outer-circle of influence from one's culture, awareness of contexts can sensitize us to variations in the way a child may act in different settings. Each layer plays an important part in the overall

development of the child. Inter-relationships which shape development include but are not limited to the people and processes of context and time that impact environmental influences (Bronfenbrenner, 2001).

For proximal processes to have a lasting impact on development, they must be situated within the child's environment, occurring on a regular basis, for an extended period of time, and increase in complexity. One-time encounters with a person, object, or environment are unlikely to change or reshape a developmental trajectory already set in motion. The phenomenon of parenting after prison, examined through Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory and influenced by Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (2001) for these constants in a child's life.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework based on Bowlby's Attachment Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological System

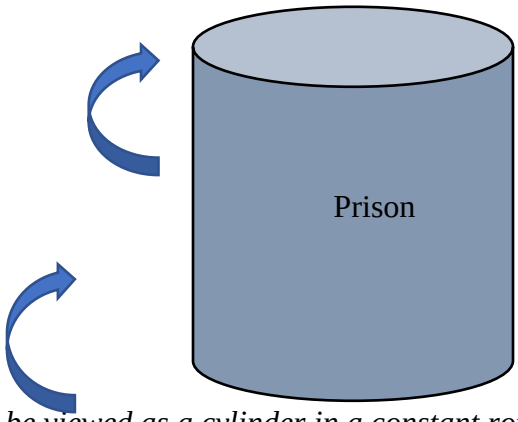

Figure 1. Prison can be viewed as a cylinder in a constant rotation. It can be a battle to stop the incarceration cycle many families fall victim to for generations. By relying on the secure attachment of a caring adult, and a supportive environment that can exist in a child's bio-ecological system, the prison mentality can be changed, and mothers can successfully parent after prison.

Significance of the Study

When a mother is taken from a family, whether by death or incarceration, the ripple effects of her loss are felt by everyone. This adds an extra burden to her extended family, friends and community members. Children with an incarcerated mother are five times as likely to end up in prison themselves. Maternal incarceration leads to a mass of behavioral issues for children (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2018). Their family life becomes unstable, their grades suffer, and they experience higher rates of aggression and depression as they struggle with the fallout of their parent's criminalization (Sharp, 2014).

Research by Sharp (2014) shows preserving a child's relationship with his mother benefits both the mother and the child. It also benefits society, reducing children's mental health issues and anxiety. It aids in facilitating a mother's reentry to her community by having resources and support readily available for her.

The significance of this study is a unique perspective looking at a mother's life after prison. The majority of research has focused on incarcerated males (Alexander, 2010; Mapson, 2013, and Modecki & Wilson, 2009), or on the damaging effects incarceration has on children (ACE, 2007 & Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1999). Research on the ways maternal incarceration affects children is limited. The desire of this particular study is to allow the mother's voice to be heard through multiple case studies. It presents a realistic and contextually rich situation that provides the researcher a glimpse into the topic of parenting after prison.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions of terms will be used in this study:

1. Incarceration: being imprisoned for a crime committed
2. Intergenerational: multiple generations
3. Offender: a person who commits a crime

4. Reentry: returning to life outside of the confines of prison walls

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In examining mothers in prison, researchers have traditionally chosen to investigate only one path, which is how the mother's criminal behaviors relate to the adverse behaviors of her children. The majority of mothers in prison share the same concerns for their children as all mothers do (Sharp, 2014). Security, safety, comfort, and education lead the concerns. Most mothers know that their incarceration has destructive consequences on their children and more times than not, it takes the mother going to prison to get clean and realize their mistakes adversely affect their children (Easterling, 2012). The children of an incarcerated mother have a higher risk of experiencing anxiety, depression, aggression, and difficulties in school (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2018). The guilt, related to being in prison can stay with the mother forever; yet incarcerated mothers are still focused on their children (Easterling, 2012).

Elementary age children often blame themselves for the mother being in prison and live in fear that the grandparent, who is often the caretaker, will leave too (Storm & Storm, 2011). Some children suffer emotional disorders they may never overcome. Most will never seek treatment from a medical professional because the child does not understand why they have these feelings even though it is normal for the trauma they are experiencing (Storm & Storm, 2011). Some children fall into the spiral of drug use in an attempt to self-medicate, leading the child down the same path to prison their mother took.

Children are impacted by having their moms imprisoned, and it is not a one-time event but a daily reality that lasts for years. The traumatic experience of having your mom in prison is of the same magnitude as abuse, domestic violence, and divorce (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016 & Sharp, 2014). For children who have incarcerated mothers, one of the main disruptions is

having their home life turned upside down by the change in living arrangements (Easterling, 2012). Children with an incarcerated mother struggle with living in an environment that most likely involves mental illness, poverty, criminal concerns, and household instability (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2018). When a child has their mother taken from them, they find stability in other things. The difficulties these children endure worsens and many children grow up living a life of crime themselves (Sharp, 2014). Maternal incarceration leads to a mass of behavioral issues for children (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2018).

According to the 2014 Oklahoma Study of Incarcerated Mothers and Their Children, thirty-two percent of the women reported that their mother, father, or both parents had been incarcerated while they were growing up (Sharp, 2014). These particular women were raised by grandparents, relatives, non-relatives, or in the foster care system. Wakefield & Wildeman (2018) estimated that around five million children in the United States had a residential parent imprisoned while they were under the age of eighteen.

Incarceration in the United States

Sharp (2014) states that as a nation, improved interventions for women experiencing hardships would begin to reduce the high rate of incarcerated mothers. President Nixon began the War on Drugs campaign in 1971 which toughened laws on illegal drug use and made sentences harsher for drug convictions. With the help of Congress, in 1982 President Reagan continued what President Nixon began a decade before; fighting the war on drugs by passing federal policy to crack down on illegal drugs (Alexander, 2012). This movement increased the enforcement and penalties offenders face, calling drug abuse public enemy number one. This also attempted to stop the smuggling of illegal narcotics into America, much of which enters the U.S. through the southern borders (Alexander, 2012). In 1986, Congress passed the Anti-Drug

Abuse Act that established mandatory prison time for offenders (Sharp, 1994). There are reports that the Act is racist, has political objectives and is destroying families and communities (Sharp, 1994) by targeting the impoverished and minorities. From 1980-2000, fathers in prison rose by 500 percent and that number impacted over five million children (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). In 1980, there were 50,000 inmates behind bars for nonviolent, drug-related crimes, which increased to over 400,000 prisoners by 1997. Today, around 500,000 people remain behind bars on drug charges. In thirty years, the impact of the war on drugs has exploded from 300,000 to more than two million drug convictions, causing the United States to have the highest rate of incarceration in the world. Women have been particularly affected by policies put in place to end the war on drugs. Blumstein and Beck (1999) estimated that from 1980 to 1996, the number of female prisoners rose from 11 percent to 51 percent.

Oklahoma Statistics

Oklahoma currently has the highest rate of imprisoning women in the United States (Sharp, 2014). Of the women in Oklahoma prisons, many are mothers faced with having to abandon their children while other states have changed to community-based treatment programs to help keep families together (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). Over 28,000 children are currently displaced by the incarceration of a parent in Oklahoma. Eighty percent of Oklahoma's female offenders are in prison for non-violent, drug related crimes, and rarely any of them have access to treatment. Women in Oklahoma convicted of drug possession were sentenced to an average of 6.2 years, a 29 percent increase from a decade ago. Sentences for drug possession and distribution are two of the top crimes that cause women in Oklahoma to be convicted (Sharp, 2014).

Oklahoma state statutes list more than 30 crimes requiring those convicted to serve 85 percent of their sentences, including six drug crimes. Oklahoma also has a three strikes law that can result in women being sentenced to life in prison without parole for drug crimes (Sharp, 2014). According to Sharp (2014), Oklahoma's lawmakers worked to change the state's criminal code in the 1990s, with "Truth in Sentencing" legislation that created a matrix of four categories of crimes – violence, sex, drugs, and other. For some offenses, such as non-violent drug offenses, sentences could be shorter. However, those convicted of the eleven types of crimes, termed "deadly sins," including rape, murder and drug trafficking would have to serve out 85 percent of their sentences. Hence, the 85 percent rule took hold.

Arkansas, Louisiana, and Georgia are three southern states that are part of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative. This initiative redirects funds from the prison system to the communities to keep families together (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). For example, Arkansas has redirected funding to allow mothers to attend community-based treatment programs. By alleviating the separation of mothers from their children, this appears to be an excellent alternative to a life behind bars and the devastating baggage it brings. Some alternate programs are at night which allows the mother the opportunity to work during the day and still support her family (Sharp, 2014). One alternative to be considered to imprisonment for mothers includes programs that allow the family to stay together while the mother is getting treatment. It is important for the mother to get help yet provide for her family and continue to be part of the community.

Mothers in Oklahoma who are imprisoned have little to no contact with their children due to multiple circumstances. Including a lack of resources by the state to keep families connected and a failure to support them after they serve their time. Judges and prosecutors have not

reformed their policies concerning sentences of women and some have even increased women's sentences for drug crimes over the last decade. Sharp's (2014) research shows that poor women in rural areas receive longer sentences, while those who can afford private attorneys get less time for the same crimes. Many small communities try to make an example out of drug felons with strict sentencing to show that they support the war on drugs. These statistics demonstrate the difficult consequences incarcerated women face and reflect the political and religious undertones of the state.

Kids Count (2016) stated that 30 percent of all Oklahoma children under the age of eighteen live in a household that receives some type of public assistance and 22 percent of those households live below the national poverty level (National Kids Count, 2016). The state's high rate of poverty lends itself to the high rate of incarceration. Drug abuse and mental illness are the main factors for women being convicted (Sharp, 2014). First-time offenders, individuals convicted of a crime for the first time and sentenced to prison, are the ones that make up most of the women Oklahoma incarcerates each year. Two-thirds of all incarcerated women are mothers (Oklahoma Department of Corrections, 2014).

In Oklahoma, 72 percent of the women are incarcerated for a non-violent offense (Oklahoma Department of Corrections, 2013). Drug-related crimes are some of the top reasons women enter the state's criminal justice system (Herrera, 2017). If the current trend continues, the state's prison system is expected to grow by nearly 60 percent over the next ten years (Sharp, 2014). Oklahoma spends about $500 million a year on the prison system, which is about twice as much as it costs to provide treatment on the outside (Herrera, 2017).

Oklahoma, considered a conservative state, is demographically located in the Bible Belt of America and is historically tough on criminals and punishment. Sharp (2014) believed that if

the state of Oklahoma would change the attitude about how women and children are viewed and treated, the incarceration rate would decrease. Sharp (2014) argues the general population of the state feels that a woman who has children and who uses drugs, violates all the norms in a way that they find unacceptable. There is a state-based organization that is piloting a program that offers an alternative to prison. Women in Recovery is a program based out of Tulsa, Oklahoma funded by the George Kaiser foundation which offers women a chance to better their life and accommodates around a dozen women at a time. According to Herrera,

> "when a woman pleads guilty, a judge can sentence her to Women in Recovery to complete a program that lasts 12 to 18 months and has helped hundreds of women with job training, finding a place to live, reconnecting with their children and dealing with the trauma that landed them in prison in the first place" (2017, p.3)".

Herrera (2017) stated Tulsa County bucked the state trend in the number of women sentenced to prison overall, too. While that number has climbed each year since 2009 in the rest of the state, it fell by more than half in Tulsa County. While it is impossible to attribute the decline to one factor, experts say the program deserves a large share of the credit. Women charged with certain offenses and who face long sentences are diverted to the program. They receive intensive oversight, including drug counseling, help with employment and life skills classes. Women graduate from the program with a job, an apartment and renewed relationships with relatives who may have given up hope. The program claims a three-year recidivism rate of about four percent. A new pay for success agreement will allow Women in Recovery to earn money from the state for each woman who successfully completes the program. While the program is praised for its impact, it only reaches about 150 women each year.

Tribal Connections

Oklahoma has a high rate of incarcerated Native American Indian population, twelve percent compared to the national average of one percent (U.S. Census, 2015. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2016) found that Native American children in Oklahoma are twice as likely as Caucasian children to have a parent imprisoned and five times more likely than tribes in the North and South Dakotas (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). This phenomenon is a gap in research that would be beneficial to study, especially for the state of Oklahoma.

There are a few tribes in Oklahoma that offer assistance to their incarcerated tribal members, from paying for college tuition to offering transition programs (Herrera, 2017). Muscogee Creek Nation's Reintegration Program is one way to ease the transition from prison to home. It is funded by the tribe and helps ex-offenders get jobs, housing and resources to rebuild their lives while supporting Native American culture. The program has helped hundreds of inmates' transition from prison to home since 2012, and it is funded by a mix of money from the tribe's gaming efforts and other business ventures (Herrera, 2017).

Cherokee Nation (2018) offers financial assistance to grandparents raising grandchildren through their relative provider program, Cherokee Connections. Cherokee Connections strives to help those caregivers through a variety of learning opportunities, while promoting Cherokee language and culture through:

- Home Visits- Educators work with providers to encourage school readiness skills and each visit lasts approximately one hour. A new topic of interest to the provider and children is provided each month. Materials and information on the topic are provided, along with learning activities, toys, music and children's books.
- Incentives- Participants in the home visiting program may be eligible for financial incentives based on four areas: improving health and safety, providing school readiness skills,

strengthening Cherokee connections (including language & culture), and the completion of 25 hours of training. Participants can earn up to $450 for completing various activities related to the focus areas.

- Material Check Out- Upon completion of the 12-month home visit program, providers can continue in the program on their own by checking out materials including learning activities, books and toys. Activities may be kept for one month and returned to the lending library. Childcare subsidy assistance helps pay for childcare while the grandparent works outside of the home (Cherokee Nation, 2018).

Barriers to Reentry

Alexander (2012) voiced the barriers to reentry faced by many criminals in her book *The New Jim Crow.* The number one barrier being discrimination. Former prisoners face discrimination finding employment, housing, continuing their education, qualifying for public social services and other benefits. Once labeled a felon, our society often views criminals as a second-class citizen even after their time has been served and they have paid their debt to society. Once you are a convicted felon of a drug related crime, you are not permitted to enlist in the military, possess a firearm, and may lose your right to vote. Family, regardless of the dysfunctionality, could be the only positive to being released back into society for many prisoners (Alexander, 2012).

Family support is one of the biggest predictors of positive reentry into society, but many mothers lack a grounded support system which is often what leads them to prison in the first place. According to research by Sharp (2014), the majority of Oklahoma female prisoners were raised without stable parenting role models. Without family support, newly released women are often left homeless or living in less than desirable locations due to lack of financial support.

Even if a mother can afford a decent place to live, many landlords will not rent to anyone with a criminal background. Alexander (2012) refers to the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 as the source of strict lease enforcement for public housing. The act allowed public housing agencies to evict any tenant, household member, or guest engaged in any criminal activity. President Clinton strengthened the act with the "One Strike and You're Out" legislation that makes it nearly impossible for a felon to apply for public housing assistance.

Only two percent of incarcerated women hold a baccalaureate degree or graduate degree (Sharp, 2011). Forty percent of all incarcerated women do not have a high school diploma or equivalent. Low education attainment often results in higher poverty rates and more state aid to support these families. Oklahoma inmates have an opportunity to take classes to earn their GED and even take college courses to help give them a competitive edge when they are released. In the fall of 2016, two community colleges in Oklahoma were selected for the Second Chance Pell Pilot program to provide Pell grants to almost three hundred incarcerated individuals to take college bearing classes toward an associate degree. The prisoners who have five years or less to serve are chosen on a lottery system to take classes (Department of Education, 2016). The attainment of an Associate degree is one step closer to breaking the poverty cycle and finding higher paying wages to help offset the cost of reentry. They are eligible for funding once released due to being a recipient of the second chance Pell grant.

Newly released mothers are obligated to pay restitution and/or court charges, as well as parole fees. Obtaining a loan for a car with a low paying job and a criminal record while trying to regain custody or partial custody of their children can be daunting for many moms (Sharp, 2014). Another obstacle faced by many mothers is they have a drug-related criminal record therefore, they are not eligible for government assistance for health care or food stamps for their children

(Mapson, 2013). In 1996, President Clinton signed a law that permanently barred individuals with drug-related felony crimes from receiving federally funded public assistance. Therefore, there is no assistance to the children of a mother with the criminal record (Alexander, 2012). The government's lack of prison reform is setting these mothers and their children up for failure with the lack of resources and supports offered to them upon reentry (Sharp, 2014).

Custodial Care

Although studies of grandparents raising grandchildren are not new, the rate of grandparents raising grandchildren increased greatly in the last decade, according to U.S. Census data from 2000 to 2015. There has been a 24 percent increase in grandparents raising grandchildren in Oklahoma alone (U.S. Census, 2014). Considering that many elderly individuals live on fixed incomes, one must wonder how grandparents are able to parent their young grandchildren in a new generation that advances quickly. According to Murphey, Cooper, & Moore (2012), about one in six infants and toddlers live in a household headed by a grandparent.

Grandparents have historically raised or helped raise their grandchildren in response to family tragedies (McGowen & Ladd, 2006) but incarceration of the mother is a new trend in family tragedies. Whether it can be considered a do-over, a reason to live and thrive, or companionship; grandparents are embracing their newfound role of parenting a second time around. Experience, wisdom, more time, and money are factors that play a role in making the parenting role better for the grandparents (Doblin-MacNab, 2006).

Much like *blended families* rose to relevance in the eighties, Grandfamilies, a term coined by Goodman (2007) are paving the way to be the next modern-day family configuration. In Grandfamilies, the grandparents are the head of the family. With the rising rate of mothers

serving time in prison, this version of skipped generation family is becoming the norm (Goodman, 2007). Social support, connected families, and strong relationships are factors that make the Grandfamilies flourish (Gerard, Landry-Meyer, & Roe, 2006). Grandparents deal with their new role as the custodial parent through creating bonds, developing relationships, and spending quality time with the grandchild (Storm & Storm, 2011).

Regardless of whether the child lived at home with the mother before incarceration, more than half of the grandparents provided the primary financial support for the child (Sharp, 2014). Past research (Bowlby, 1988) has proven children are adversely impacted by their mother's incarceration. Children who are left to be raised by grandparents when the mother enters the prison system may experience ill effects such as attachment and abandonment issues (Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001). They develop difficulties with attachment to others, which can lead to mental health, relationship issues, and the possibility of entering into a life of crime (Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001).

Parental Care

Research shows preserving a child's relationship with their mother benefits both mother and the child (Poehlmann, 2005). Hearing from a child can add comfort and bring happiness for an incarcerated mother. Just knowing the child is doing well can dispel uncertainty and lessen the guilt for the mother (Poehlmann, Shlafer, Maes, & Hanneman, 2008). Regular communication may also serve as a reminder to the mother to work toward reuniting with her child through self-improvement opportunities. Steps may include seeking treatment for traumatic life experiences or earning college credit (Poehlmann, 2005). It aids in facilitating a mother's reentry to her community by having resources and support readily available for her (Sharp, 2014).

Oklahoma does not currently have a system in place to allow constant contact with mothers and their children (Sharp, 2014). Incarcerated mothers have few opportunities if any, to parent from behind bars. There are currently two state-owned women prison facilities in Oklahoma and neither are ideal for children to spend quality time at with their mom (Oklahoma Department of Corrections, 2014), due to unfriendly spaces for children and poor quality conditions of the facilities. The wait for a child to visit his mother after she is transferred to one of these facilities can take up to eight weeks. Once a visitor is approved, it is the responsibility of the inmate to contact her family or the caretaker for her child and inform them of their approved visitation, which is an obstacle itself. The inmate must have money put on her account from a person on the outside to make phone calls or to purchase an envelope and stamp. Visitation takes place on Saturday and Sundays only.

Depending on the inmate's classification, they may get one hour to eight hours of visitation. Once the family arrives, they may wait up to two hours to be allowed inside. This is after passing through metal detectors and undergoing intensive screenings by armed guards and canine units. Children are not exempt from these security measures. Once cleared, the family is ushered to an old gymnasium that holds all the inmates and their visitors. The gym is filled with small round tables, three to four chairs per table, large industrial fans for ventilation, and a line of vending machines. Visitors are allowed to bring in twenty dollars' worth of quarters to eat and buy the inmate items to eat during the visit. Besides the loud, over-crowded area, many children may wait up to an hour to see their mother. There are processes for everything, and you could potentially be waiting three hours for a hug, plus your travel time.

Eddie Warrior Correctional facility is in a rural setting and not easily accessible for many families to visit due to the distance from a major city. Mabel Bassett Correctional facility

houses inmates that range from minimum security to death row sentences. According to the Oklahoma Department of Corrections (2014) all female inmates begin serving their time at Mable Bassett. Depending on their sentencing and mental assessment they might be transferred to Eddie Warrior to carry out their time and serve their sentence. Regardless of which correctional facility the mother resides at, contact with her child remains a priority for the majority of women incarcerated.

Many families are already on fixed incomes and taking on the added responsibility of caring for a child or children of an incarcerated parent adds to the family stress. Younger children are not able to correspond with their mother by mail unless the caretaker assists, and many are not willing to do so (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2018). Phone calls can be costly and limited. Many families spend up to a third of their income on maintain constant contact with an inmate. Mailing letters and cards, sending care packages when allowed, telephone deposits, plus the added expense of making visits (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2018).

It can be excruciatingly painful, lonely, and depressing for the many mothers behind bars. The mother benefits with regular contact with their children by helping to reduce the pain associated with separation. Parental contact reassures the child that the mother still loves him or her that the parent is alive and well (Sharp, 2014). Once a release date is determined, stress sets in for the majority of inmates. Inmates struggle with decisions of where they will live, how they will afford to live, and whether or not they will regain custody of their children. They worry about whether they will be able to avoid offenses for the sake of their children.

Gaps in Research

There appear to be many gaps in the research when one is looking at a mother's life of parenting after prison and trying to break the prison cycle for their children. The majority of

research has been focused on incarcerated males (Alexander, 2010; Mapson, 2013, Modecki & Wilson, 2009, and Mumola, 2000) or the damaging effects incarceration has on children (ACE, 2007 & Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1999). Women, specifically mothers, who are incarcerated face countless hardships prior to beginning their sentence. These hardships include untreated mental health issues, living with abuse or past abuse, and lack of a high school diploma (Sharp, 2014). As a result of the dramatic increase in the number of female offenders, there is a need for strategies that are gender-specific and community based (Mapson, 2013).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study in order to understand how mothers recently released from prison feel about their current parenting practices. This study will focus on six mothers and if they are able to reunite with their children and begin to rebuild the parent/child relationship. A case study approach will be used to seek answers to how and why types of questions (Yin, 2009). This study will offer the parental participants the opportunity to share their story of parenting after prison from their own perspective (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009).

The stories will be told through in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and documented analysis in order to provide thick and rich descriptions (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). As a result, qualitative studies can provide a deep level of understanding (Patton, 2002). As such, the research questions guiding this study include:

1.What was the mother's reunification process and timeline to reconnect with her children?

2. How is parenting different now than it was before prison?

3. What obstacles do mothers face after prison in their efforts to be an effective parent?

4. Based on those obstacles, what support/resources/information would have benefited the mothers in becoming a more effective parent?

Case Study

The methodology for this qualitative study is the case study paradigm. Looking at parenting after prison is the objective of this study. All case study research starts from the same compelling feature: the desire to derive a close or otherwise in-depth understanding of a single or small number of cases set in their real-world contexts (Bromley, 1986). The closeness aims to produce an invaluable and deep understanding resulting in new learning about real-world behavior and its meaning. The case study methodology permits the researcher to answer "how" and "why" type questions, while taking into consideration how a phenomenon is influenced by the context within which it is situated (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Yin (2009) supports case studies as a way of research by examining complex conditions related to the case studied as integral to understanding the case.

A case study will give allowance for research inquiry that examines a real-life contemporary phenomenon, in this case, parenting after prison by exploring situations that have no clear set of outcomes (Yin, 2009). This research approach allows the study to be viewed through multiple lens. Case study design focuses on bringing out the specifics from the perspective of the participants by using multiple sources of data (Tellis, 1997). Individual interviews with the mothers, questionnaires, and parent logs will be used to gain the data needed for this research study.

Related Studies

Case study as a research methodology is widely used in the social science field but many disciplines, such as education, utilize this design (Yin, 2009). Easterling (2012) formed her study around the feminist epistemology researching incarcerated mothers and their accounts of parenting behind bars. Easterling focused on the relationships between the custodial caregivers, the children, and the incarcerated mothers. Easterling produced a detailed picture of how incarcerated mothers experience, define, and negotiate motherhood from prison.

Sharp (2014) studied the incarceration of women for decades using the feminist strain theory. Sharp uncovered the harsh realities of women in prison in the state of Oklahoma and the ongoing epidemic in the state. The majority of Sharp's participants were mothers, and her studies offered a glance into the lives of the children that have a mother in prison. Ogbonna and Nordin (2009) used case study methodology to research women incarcerated in the state of Tennessee. Ogbonna and Nordin examined the long-term outlook for children with incarcerated parents and the heightened risk of poor mental health, antisocial behavior, and more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system.

Participants and Setting

Merriam (2009) states, "To find the best case to study, you would first establish the criteria that will guide case selection and then select a case that meets those criteria" (p. 81). The best-case scenario in this situation are mothers who have been released from prison within the last two years. Utilizing a criterion sampling approach (Patton, 2002), each of the six mothers chosen to participate in the study meet the following specifications:

a. Recently released from prison
b. Were incarcerated at Eddie Warrior Correctional Facility
c. Current residents of Oklahoma

d. The researcher was their Instructor while they were incarcerated

Data Collection and Procedures

This study will use a variety of techniques for data collection to provide rich description and detail (Merriam, 2009). The following section provides an explanation of the data sources chosen to answer each of the research questions along with their procedures. The participants will voluntarily choose to participate. As part of the Institutional Review Board process, signing a consent form and allowing participants to choose their own pseudonym due to the sensitive topic of incarceration and family life will be part of the protocol of this study.

Questionnaires

Demographic and background information will be obtained via a Qualtrics questionnaire (See Appendix A). Each participant will complete the questionnaire using a link sent to them via email; answers can be completed by phone, tablet, or computer. The questionnaire will be given to the participants for each mother to answer some personal questions they might not feel comfortable answering verbally in the face-to-face interviews. (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). The questionnaire will be administered before the initial interview electronically.

Interviews

The purpose of interviewing is to collect information from people regarding concepts we cannot directly observe (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). “The fact is that we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Because this study aims to understand parenting after prison from a maternal lens, a topic that cannot be directly observed, interviews are an appropriate method of data collection. Interviews can offer richer and more extensive material than data from surveys or even the open-ended portions of survey instruments (Yin, 2006, 2009b, and 2011). The flexible format permits open-

ended interviews. If properly done, interviews reveal how case study participants construct reality and think about situations, not just to provide the answers to a researcher's specific questions and own implicit construction of reality. For some case studies, the participants' construction of reality provides important insights into the case (Yin, 2006, 2009b, and 2011).

The participants will be interviewed three times, with each ranging from one to two hours in length. The importance of the three interviews allows the researcher to gain useful insight from the first interview to create questions that complement the participant's answers. The initial interview will utilize the set of questions predetermined by the researcher. The remaining two interview question sets will be formed from interview responses. A semi-structured approach to the interviewing process will occur (See Appendix B for Interview Questions and Protocol). This type of approach allows for questions that seek specific information but also has the flexibility to explore unexpected responses that can lead to additional information (Merriam, 2009). Each interview location will be determined by the participant's current residency. It is expected that many will take place across the state, minimizing the amount of effort on the participant due to possible transportation issues. The interviews will be audio recorded to ensure the participant's stories are not construed by possible errors in written notes.

Parent Log

The mothers will be asked to keep a parent log for three weeks in which they document such things as their personal reflections and their children's responses to spending time with them. They will be asked to respond to the log at least two days a week. The researcher will provide the parent log electronically by sending to the participants weekly through Facebook messenger. The researcher will offer writing prompts and open-ended questions. If the mother

only has her children on the weekends for visitation, the two days a week parent log requirement will suffice since that is the only time, she may have the children.

Examples of the writing prompts:

- What was the reunification process like for you to reconnect with your children…?
- Tell me how parenting is different now than it was before prison…
- List obstacles you face after prison that may hinder you from being an effective parent…
- What support/resources/information would have benefited you in becoming a more effective parent…
- A parenting method I use to help me bond with my child is…
- Open prompt- talk about what is on your mind regarding your children and/or your parenting…

Data Analysis

Keeping the research questions in mind, immersion in the data collected will look to identify emerging codes, patterns, categories, or themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Triangulation of interviews, questionnaire, and the mother's log will occur during the data analysis process. "Researchers should not rely on any single source of data, interview, observation, or instrument" (Mills, 2000, p. 49). Taking external steps in relation to credibility will lend the research accuracy and value (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulating the data will minimize any bias that could have transpired within the conclusions or findings. Examining this research context in different ways and from different perspectives will be important in attempting to describe and understand the data. Data will be compared to see if the inferences drawn from one type of data were comparable with those obtained in other types of data

(Bazeley, 2013). Triangulation will also occur by connecting the research back to the existing body of literature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Pattern matching, the most recommended tactic for case study research, will be used for the purposes of internal validity (Yin, 2009). Patterns will predict initial codes based on the literature review and theoretical framework used in this study. Data from the in-depth interviews, questionnaire responses, and parent logs will be transcribed verbatim and entered into the qualitative data analysis software program Dedoose. This will help with sorting and organizing the vast amount of information that will be obtained from the participants.

Level one analysis will determine the need for evidence to match the study's paradigm. For example, did the interview questions provide enough open-ended opportunity for the participant to answer freely? Level two will include re-examining codes and collapsing codes. Level three analysis will look at all the themes across the board to make sense of the data collection and ensure that it reflects the story being told.

Ethical Considerations

Once approval has been granted from my committee, the study will be submitted to the Institutional Review Board at the University of Oklahoma. Patton (2002) devised an Ethical Issues Checklist that was utilized for the purposes of addressing ethical concerns within this study. The items on the checklist include explaining the purpose, promises and reciprocity, risk assessment, and confidentiality to the participants. Other ethical considerations that need to be addressed is the researcher was formerly their instructor and it is my primary goal to safeguard the ethics throughout this study from previous instructor to researcher.

Trustworthiness

The four pillars to having trustworthiness in a qualitative research study according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The goal of trustworthiness is to "persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Trustworthiness ensures that the study's findings are genuine, meaningful, and can be trusted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

A relationship was established between the mother and the researcher when the researcher was the Instructor for the Parenting class while the mother was incarcerated. To assure the accuracy of the findings, the established relationship will deepen the trustworthiness and the credibility of the study and the internal validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation of data is one of the most common methods used to establishing creditability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The interviews, questionnaires, and parent logs will provide the three sources of data to triangulate. Research findings will be connected to the review of Literature to add another layer of credibly to the study. The researcher will participate in weekly peer debriefing meetings with fellow doctoral students to discuss analyses of data that offer unbiased views of the study,

Transferability

The variety of data sources and amount that will be collected over a two-month timeframe will offer rich descriptions to illustrate the transferability of the data. The transferability of data invites the reader in to externalize the study. The researcher will use descriptions that include contextual and substantial material.

Dependability

Data will be collected in various ways that include the parent logs, interviews, and a questionnaire that will offer dependability by comparing and contrasting the findings to establish reliability. External peer audits will be utilized to ensure dependability of the study by evaluating the accuracy of the findings to determine if they are supported by the data and literature. It will allow the readers to understand the research method and its effectiveness of telling the participants stories from a dependable finding.

Confirmability

The final pillar in trustworthiness, confirmability ensures the study is objective and not influenced by the researcher's biases. Triangulation of the data helps prevent biases and strengthens the trustworthiness of the study. The researcher will use the study's findings based off of the participants' narratives and words rather than potential researcher biases. The researcher will keep documentation of details of the data collection by recording patterns and interesting topics during data collection. The researcher will maintain a field notebook and use it as a reflective tool during the research process.

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Appendix A: Initial Interview Questions

- Did you live in a home with two parents or one?
    - Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
- Did you have siblings? If so, how many lived with you during your childhood years?

- Did your parents struggle with substance abuse of any type (examples: alcohol, recreational drugs, prescription drugs, etc.)?
- Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?
- Did you witness any type of violence growing up? If so, please explain?
- Did you suffer any type of abuse growing up? Is so, please explain?
- How many times did you move as a child?
- Did you live with relatives other than your parents?
- Were you part of the foster care system at any time before you turned 18 years of age?
- How old were you when you had your first child?
- How many children did you give birth to?
- How many children do you have contact with?
- Did you finish high school?
    - If not, what age did you drop out of school?
    - What obstacles did you face that made decide to drop out of high school?
    - Did you earn your GED while in prison?
- What do you want to do career wise now that you are out of prison?
- Is there anything you would like to tell me about the path that led you to prison?

Appendix B: Second Round Interview Questions

- Did a household member go to prison? If yes, what was their relationship to you?
- What age were you when you were first arrested?
- What age were you when you went to prison?

- Have you been in prison more than once? If so, how many times?
- How many months/years did you serve time in prison?
- Did you have a significant other arrested with you?
- If so, are you two still together or did you part ways after being arrested?
- What was your occupation prior to being arrested?
- How many children did you have living with you and what were their ages at the time of your arrest?
- Who took care of your children while you were incarcerated?
    - Did you have a custody arrangement?
- Did you have any contact with your children while you were in prison such as phone calls, letters, or visits? Please explain.
- Do you view your children differently now since you were separated from them? Please explain.
- Has your view of being a mother changed? Please explain.

Appendix C: Demographic Information on Participants

Table 1
Demographic Information on Participants

Name (pseudonym)	Race/Ethnicity	Age	Number of children

Amy	Caucasian/White	34	2
Bambi	Native American	33	3
Chevelle	Caucasian/White	32	3
Denise	Native American	36	3
Dona	Caucasian/White	42	3
Journee	Native American	34	2

Appendix D: Results

Table 2
Overarching Themes

Overarching Theme	Categories	Description

Adjusting to the Parenting Role	Mixed feelings about their return and new role as a parent Parenting challenges and role ambiguity Different adjustments by circumstances	Mixed feelings such as excitement, resentment, guilt, and grief Parenting is harder than expected since returning home Ease of adjustment differ by personal and family circumstances
Personal Barriers	Psychological distress and mental health concerns Poverty Friends/ lack of friends Difficulty with former spouses	Dealing with past addictions Loneliness, anxiety, depression, isolation, claustrophobic Low wages and responsible for paying restitution fees Developing friendships prove difficult with limited social time due to working multiple jobs and little opportunities to meet new people Having to face former spouses
Criminal Discrimination	Several restrictions to daily life Criminal stigma	Difficulty renting and getting access to many public places and events due to past record Ankle monitor inhibits freedom Gossiping and disapproval in community and feeling of discomfort in social settings
Family/Inmate Peer Support	Instrumental support including living arrangements and monetary support Emotional support Substitute caregiving role for children Inmate peer support	Provided a place to live for the children and mother Clothing, school supplies, and sports equipment paid for by mother/grandmother Confidant, biggest supporter during and after incarceration Cared for children during and after incarcerated Shared experiences and understanding Friendship and accountability
Mothers Desire and Motivation	Dedication to their children Motivated to stay clean	Strong desire to repair their relationships with their children and be a good mother Motivation to stay out of trouble and in recovery

Appendix E: Internal Review Board Study Approval Letter

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Board Review – AP01

Date: November 08, 2019

Principal Investigator: Kimberly Dawn Phillips

IRB#: 11171
Study Title: Parenting After Prison: A Maternal Approach

IRB Meeting Date: 10/31/2019

IRB Approval Date: 11/07/2019
IRB Expiration Date: 10/31/2020

Collection/Use of PHI: No

The review and approval of this submission is based on the determination that the study will be conducted in a manner consistent with the requirements of 45 CFR 46.

To view the approved documents for this submission, open this study from the My Studies option, go to Submission History, go to Completed Submissions tab and then click the Details icon.

You will receive notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date noted above. You are responsible for submitting continuing review documents in a timely fashion in order to maintain continued IRB approval.

You are also responsible for:

- Ensuring this research is conducted as approved by the IRB.
- Obtaining consent using the currently approved, stamped consent form and retaining all original, signed consent forms, if applicable.
- Informing the IRB of any/all modifications prior to implementing those changes.
- Reporting any serious, unanticipated harms as per Policy 407 and/or any additional information that may change the risk, benefit, or desire for participants to continue in the study.
- Submitting a final closure report at the completion of the project.
- Keeping and maintaining accurate study records as your study is subject to quality improvement evaluation.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Aimee Franklin, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Kimberly Phillips, spring 2019 Prospectus Plan to Dissertation

1. Prospectus Draft
   Due to Libby: Feb. 5

Submission Date: 2/5/19
Meet with Libby on or around 2/13/19 Rewrite due: 2/23/19

2. Prospectus Defense Scheduling
   Due: 2/25/19

3. Prospectus to Committee
   Due: Feb. 28

4. Defend Prospectus
   Due: The week of March 11 if committee member's schedules allow

5. IRB Approval
   Submit completed IRB
   Due: March 15

6. As soon as IRB Approval- begin research
   Complete research and compile data by May 1, 2019
   Due: May 1, 2019

7. Write, re-write, edit, re-write again, and cry, etc. on the three articles.
   Due: Tentatively Defend by June 7, 2019