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# Stigma and the Educational Experience of Children of Incarcerated Parents

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**Abstract**

Stigma and the Educational Experience of Children of Incarcerated Parents

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This dissertation uses a mixed methods approach to examine the stigmatization of children of incarcerated parents and its impact on educational experience. Prior research on educational disparities indicates that both psychological effects of stigma and teachers' judgements can adversely impact academic outcomes. Scholars have also shown a correlation between school discipline and academic achievement. In this dissertation, the stigma of parental incarceration is explored along two dimensions – the experience of, and response to, stigmatization from the perspective of children who have experienced parental incarceration, and stigma from the perspective of teachers responding to classroom misbehavior. As illustrated through the accounts of children of incarcerated parents, the experience and the effects of stigmatization vary greatly between individuals and across contexts. One theme appearing frequently in these accounts and throughout the literature on parental incarceration is the impression that children of incarcerated

parents are viewed as more prone to delinquency than their peers, due to the associative stigma of parental incarceration. This theme is further examined through a factorial survey of teachers, which reveals that teachers are more inclined to attribute the misbehavior of children with incarcerated parents to internal characteristics, living in a rough neighborhood, and chaos at home. While theory suggests that these attributions could contribute to differential treatment for children of incarcerated parents, the findings presented here do not suggest that teachers' disciplinary decisions are affected by parental incarceration.

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# **PART I**

## Chapter 1: Introduction

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This dissertation examines the educational experience of children of incarcerated parents, a group of young people situated at the intersection of two highly stratifying social institutions – the school system and the criminal justice system. The black-white gap in academic achievement is well-documented, as is the disproportionate impact of criminal justice expansion on communities of color. Racial inequality in education worsens racial disparities in incarceration—black students are less likely to complete high school than their white peers, and black high school dropouts are over five times as likely to be incarcerated at some point in their lives as white high school dropouts (Pettit 2012; Pettit and Western 2004). Research also suggests that racial disparities in educational achievement are closely tied to disparities in suspension and expulsion, and that police presence in schools increases the likelihood that school discipline will result in criminal justice contact for students of color (Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera 2010; Kupchik 2012; Nolan 2011).

The phenomenon whereby students underserved by the public school system and/or targeted by overly-punitive discipline policies are diverted out of schools and into the criminal justice system is frequently referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline.” Descriptions of this pipeline begin with the premise that students in high-poverty, high-minority schools are more likely to end up in prison, though there are different perspectives on the mechanisms driving this relationship. Some authors focus on issues with curriculum and classroom culture that fail to keep students academically engaged (Christensen 2012). Others focus more on the role of criminal-justice-style discipline practices that disproportionately target black and brown students (Welch and Payne 2010). Most characterize the pipeline as an interaction between academic engagement, behavior, and discipline strategies (Gregory et al. 2010; Sander 2010; Wald and

Losen 2003). In this model, systemic setbacks rooted in the lack of educational resources and qualified teachers in high-poverty, high minority schools contribute to educational disadvantages for students. These academic barriers contribute to disengagement with school and interact with school discipline strategies that result in the disproportionate suspension, expulsion, and arrest of students of color (Gregory et al. 2010; Sander 2010; Wald and Losen 2003). In an era of mass incarceration marked both by historically high rates of incarceration and stark race and class inequalities, the school-to-prison pipeline highlights the ways in which the interconnectedness of the two systems reinforces inequalities in both.

The school-to-prison pipeline illustrates the process whereby inequalities in education contribute to inequalities in incarceration, but does not help us understand the reverse relationship—whether and how mass incarceration produces inequalities in education. Research on the collateral consequences of incarceration indicates that the connection between school discipline and incarceration is not unidirectional, as suggested by the pipeline analogy. It may be more appropriate to think of the relationship between education and incarceration as a circuit. In addition to the direct association between low education and the risk of incarceration, there are intergenerational effects whereby parental incarceration adversely impacts the educational outcomes of children. Children with incarcerated parents enter school less prepared, are more likely to experience grade retention, have lower school engagement, have slower cognitive development, and complete fewer years of schooling than their peers (Foster and Hagan 2007, 2009, Haskins 2014, 2016; Turney and Haskins 2014). Moreover, parental incarceration has spillover effects—graduation rates are lower in schools with high rates of parental incarceration, even among children whose parents are not incarcerated (Hagan and Foster 2012a). Recent research suggests that, due the highly racialized nature of criminal justice in the U.S., the adverse

impacts of parental incarceration explain between 2 and 15 percent of the black-white achievement gap (Haskins 2016).

The evidence that parental incarceration directly affects children’s educational outcomes is strong, but the mechanisms driving this process of educational detainment<sup>1</sup> are not well-understood. While these children likely face many risk factors known to contribute to poor educational outcomes—like poverty, neighborhood disorganization, racial segregation, and family disruption—research suggests that there is something unique about parental incarceration that generates worse outcomes for these children than their similarly-situated peers. The aim of this dissertation is not to quantify the effects of parental incarceration relative to other factors known to drive inequality in education, but rather to investigate *how and why* parental incarceration is associated with worse educational outcomes. Specifically, this dissertation will examine stigmatization as a possible mechanism contributing to the educational detainment of children of incarcerated parents.

As illustrated in Figure 1, I suggest that the stigma of parental incarceration could affect the educational experience of children in two ways: 1) through the effects of stigma felt by children as a result of their parent’s incarceration—which leads to social withdrawal, disengagement with school, or the internalization of stereotypes associated with parental incarceration, and/or 2) through differential treatment on the part of teachers reacting to problem behavior – a situation in which parental incarceration may be relevant due to assumptions that “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

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<sup>1</sup> The term “educational detainment” is used by Foster and Hagan (2007) to describe the process whereby paternal incarceration, particularly when coupled with father’s low educational achievement, leads to adverse effects of parental incarceration on educational attainment and subsequent social exclusion in young adulthood.

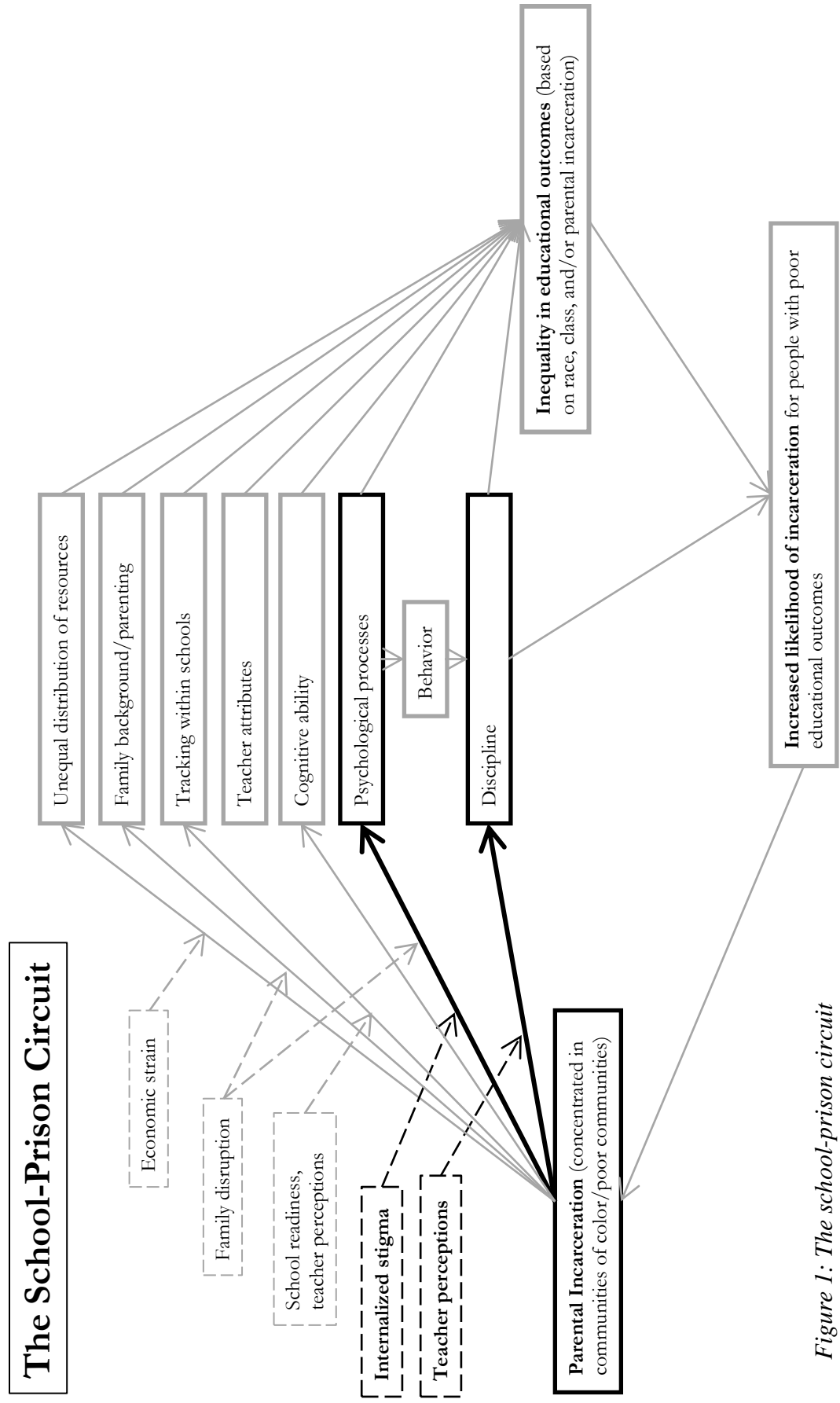


Figure 1: The school-prison circuit

This dissertation uses a mixed-methods approach to explore both dimensions of stigma – the experience of, and response to, stigmatization from the perspective of children who have experienced parental incarceration, and stigma from the perspective of those around them. Following a review of the literature and a discussion of my theoretical framework in Part I, I present my methodology and findings in two parts. In Part II, I use qualitative interviews and observations to detail variations in the stigma of parental incarceration. As revealed through the accounts of children of incarcerated parents, the experience and the effects of stigmatization vary greatly between individuals and across contexts. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the contours of this variation and identify factors that could mediate the effects of the stigma of parental incarceration on children. In Part III, I use a factorial survey of teachers to examine whether external judgements play a role in the way teachers react to problem behavior. Chapter 7 reveals that when students have a father in prison, teachers are more inclined to attribute their misbehavior to internal characteristics, living in a rough neighborhood, and chaos at home. While theory suggests that these attributions could contribute to differential treatment for children of incarcerated parents, my findings do not suggest that teachers' disciplinary decisions are affected by parental incarceration.

## Inequality and education

Over sixty years since *Brown v. Board of Education* established desegregation as a means to equalize educational opportunities between black and white students, we continue to see racial inequality in educational outcomes. While the black-white gap in standardized test scores has narrowed in recent decades, the typical black student still scores below 75 percent of white students on most tests, and the rate of high school completion among black students is eleven percentage points lower than their white peers (Jencks and Phillips 1998; Pettit 2012). The

literature examining racial inequality in educational outcomes identifies several family/background, school, and student characteristics that contribute to these gaps.

One factor commonly understood to shape unequal outcomes for black and white students is social class. Because class and race are highly correlated, any impact that class background has on educational opportunities and outcomes will also contribute to black-white inequality. Non-school factors associated with social class that contribute to inequalities in education include health (hunger, poor nutrition, low birth weight, learning disabilities, absences from school), family structure (single-parent and larger families, housing mobility, early childcare), and cultural/social capital (educational resources at home, intergenerational closure, resources available through networks) (Condrón 2009). Social class does not, however, fully explain racial inequalities in education; social class only accounts for about 1/3 of the black-white achievement gap (Condrón 2009). In fact, separating the effects of race and class reveals that class inequalities in achievement increase over the summer months, but narrow during the school year. Race inequalities, on the other hand, widen throughout the school year. This suggests that inequalities between and within schools have a greater impact on producing racial disparities, whereas non-school factors (such as family and background characteristics) have a greater impact on class effects (Condrón 2009).

Condrón (2009) identifies several school-related factors that drive racial inequalities in education, including academic tracking, racial segregation, and teacher attributes. Race has been shown to impact students' placement into gifted and talented programs and college-prep courses (Elhoweris et al. 2005; Lleras 2008; Oakes 2005). Inequalities produced by ability grouping early on constrain opportunities, widening gaps in academic achievement as students progress through their school career (Lleras 2008; Oakes 2005). The effects of racial segregation on the

achievement gap are difficult to separate from other effects related to class and neighborhood characteristics, but there is some evidence that students in schools with a higher concentration of minority students are disadvantaged in terms of course placement, school engagement, and academic achievement (Lleras 2008). Schools in poor black neighborhoods also tend to be low on resources and employ teachers with fewer teaching credentials, which leads to further disparities between black and white students (Condron 2009; Kozol 2014; Lleras 2008).

Another school-related factor that influences inequality in academic outcomes is discipline (Gregory et al. 2010). Educational research shows that there are clear links between behavior and academic achievement. Students labeled by teachers and administrators as exhibiting problem behavior are typically the same students who struggle academically, and these students are disproportionately students of color. However, in both criminal justice and school discipline, racial disparities are amplified by the way that officials respond to behavior. Research shows that black and Latinx children are much more likely than white students to be sent to the office, suspended, and expelled from school, net of background characteristics and actual behavior (Gregory et al. 2010; Han and Akiba 2011; Horner, Fireman, and Wang 2010; Peguero and Shekarkhar 2011; Skiba et al. 2011; Vavrus and Cole 2002; Welch and Payne 2010). Exclusionary sanctions (suspensions and expulsions) greatly increase the likelihood that students will not complete high school (Gregory et al. 2010). Further, high rates of exclusionary punishment in schools negatively affects the academic achievement of non-suspended students in the same schools (Perry and Morris 2014). Students of color are also more likely to come in contact with the criminal justice system as a result of school discipline, regardless of where their school is located (Hirschfield 2008; Kupchik 2012; Nolan 2011).

In addition to non-school and school-related factors, social psychologists have identified psychological processes that contribute to the black-white achievement gap, most notably stereotype threat. The literature on stereotype threat provides evidence that stigmatized individuals will subconsciously behave in ways that conform to stereotypes attached to the group of which they are members (Steele and Aronson 1995). Stereotype threat has been used to explain the academic underachievement of women and minorities, showing that even when people don't agree with the stereotype attached to their group, the awareness that a stereotype exists can cause anxiety and disrupt academic performance. Stereotype threat can also be used to explain higher dropout rates among minorities, because, according to this theory, people will try to avoid situations where the stereotype would be salient.

Recent studies suggest that parental incarceration might also contribute to the black-white achievement gap. Because maternal incarceration occurs at much lower rates than paternal incarceration, recent quantitative research on the effects of parental incarceration on education has focused primarily on fathers. Several rigorous studies have found that paternal incarceration is negatively associated with GPA, years of schooling, and college completion (Foster and Hagan 2007, 2009; Hagan and Foster 2012b). The few studies that have examined the effect of maternal incarceration are somewhat inconclusive—research shows that the likelihood of grade retention is decreased but risk of dropping out is increased following a mother's incarceration (Cho 2009, 2011; Hagan and Foster 2012a).

While there are not strong indications that race interacts with parental incarceration to generate worse outcomes for blacks than whites, racial disparities in incarceration rates produce a disproportionate number of black children who have experienced parental incarceration. Due to the concentration of incarceration in communities of color, Haskins (2016) finds that parental

incarceration explains 2 to 15 percent of the black-white gap in academic achievement. Further, the effects of parental incarceration have “spillover effects” at the school-level, whereby students at schools with higher levels of parental incarceration have lower GPAs, levels of education, and rates of college completion (Hagan and Foster 2012b, 2012a). Together, the literature on the collateral consequences of mass incarceration and social psychological research on stigma suggest that the relationship between parental incarceration and educational attainment could be driven, in part, by factors already known to contribute to the black-white achievement gap: school discipline and psychological processes. In the sections that follow, I discuss the role of parental incarceration in shaping educational outcomes.

## Parental incarceration and educational attainment

As of 2007, state and federal prisoners were parents to almost 2 million children, an increase of 80% since 1991 (Glaze and Maruschak 2008; Mumola 2000; Western 2007). As a result of the prison boom, approximately 2% of all minor children have a parent in prison at any given time (Glaze and Maruschak 2008; Travis and Waul 2003b; Western and Pettit 2010). Parental incarceration is not distributed equally throughout the population; black children are over six times more likely than white children to experience parental incarceration. White children born in 1990 had a 4% chance of experiencing parental incarceration by age 14 and black children born in 1990 had a 25% chance of experiencing incarceration by age 14. The prevalence of parental incarceration is far greater among children of high school dropouts; half of all black children born in 1990 to high school dropouts have experienced parental incarceration (Wildeman 2009).

Research indicates that parental incarceration has short-term impacts on the emotional wellbeing of children. Children often experience trauma if present at the time of arrest, followed by emotional distress at the loss of a parent and confusion about what happened (Bernstein 2005; Braman 2004; Comfort 2008; Hairston 2007; Hungerford 1996; Johnston 1995; McGowan and Blumenthal 1978; Travis and Waul 2003b). While research indicates that the consequences of parental incarceration are widespread and predominately negative,<sup>2</sup> there is variation in the impact that parental incarceration has on children. The detrimental effects of parental incarceration on behavior, emotional wellbeing, and parent-child relationships are greater for some children than others. For instance, the effect of fathers' incarceration on contact with their children and informal child support agreements is much greater for white fathers than their black or Latinx counterparts (Swisher and Waller 2008); the impact on a father's parenting involvement and on a child's behavior (both externalizing and internalizing) is stronger for children who lived with their father prior to his incarceration (Geller et al. 2012; Turney and Wildeman 2013); the impacts on social-emotional wellbeing and behavior are greater for boys than girls (Haskins 2015); paternal incarceration is associated with more behavioral problems than maternal incarceration (Wildeman and Turney 2014); and the higher a mother's propensity for incarceration, the less impact it has on a child's well-being (Turney and Wildeman 2015; Wildeman and Turney 2014); and maternal incarceration is more strongly associated with high school attrition than paternal incarceration (Huynh-Hohnbaum, Bussell, and Lee 2015).

Beyond the immediate impacts of a parent's incarceration, there is evidence that parental incarceration has lasting impacts on children as they reach adulthood. Foster and Hagan (2007)

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<sup>2</sup> In some instances, the removal of a violent or drug addicted parent from the home can be beneficial (Bernstein 2005; Comfort 2008; Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999; Siegel 2011; Turanovic, Rodriguez, and Pratt 2012; Turney and Wildeman 2013).

identify a “cumulative process of intergenerational disadvantage that begins with father’s educational detainment and incarceration, moves through their children’s educational detainment, and results in forms of emerging adult social exclusion” (p. 421). Not only do men with low educational attainment face a higher risk of incarceration (Pettit and Western 2004; Wildeman 2009), young adults who have experienced parental incarceration tend to be less educated than their peers who have not (Foster and Hagan 2007, 2009). This intergenerational process of educational detainment leads to higher rates of homelessness, healthcare uninsuredness, and political nonparticipation among children of incarcerated parents as they enter adulthood. Foster and Hagan argue that exclusionary outcomes are not only shaped by the individual-level occurrence of parental incarceration, but by school and state punishment and policy regimes (Foster and Hagan 2015).

Findings that parental incarceration directly affects children’s educational outcomes (and subsequent social exclusion) enhance our understanding of the intergenerational consequences of incarceration. Research has established that education is a pivotal site for the transmission of disadvantage from incarcerated parents to their children, but the mechanisms driving this process of educational detainment are not well understood. While these children likely face many risk factors known to contribute to poor educational outcomes—e.g., poverty, neighborhood disorganization, racial segregation, family disruption—it is apparent that there is something unique about parental incarceration that generates worse outcomes for these children than their similarly situated peers. Below, I identify several mechanisms that may mediate the relationship between parental incarceration and educational detainment.

### *Family disruption and economic strain as possible mechanisms*

The emotional and financial strain of losing a custodial parent is commonly discussed in the literature on parental incarceration and may have implications for educational outcomes. A 2008 study reported that 46.5% of fathers and 64.2% of mothers in state prisons lived with their children either in the month before arrest or just prior to incarceration (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). Because almost half of incarcerated parents lived with their children prior to arrest, much of the research on negative impacts of parental incarceration on children focuses on the impact of parent-child separation.

Disrupting the attachment between parents and children can lead to a variety of emotional and behavioral consequences (Applewhite and Mays 1996). Indeed, children of incarcerated parents are prone to depression, aggressive behavior, attention problems, and delinquency (Braman 2004; Eddy and Reid 2003; Geller et al. 2012; Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999; Haskins 2014, 2015; Murray, Farrington, and Sekol 2012; Park and Clarke-Stewart 2003; Roettger and Swisher 2011; Wakefield and Wildeman 2014; Wilbur et al. 2007; Wildeman 2010). The stress of parental incarceration has gendered and racialized effects—maternal incarceration contributes to increased depressive symptoms and paternal incarceration contributes to increased aggressive behavior and substance use, and young men of color are most vulnerable to these effects (Foster and Hagan 2013; Wildeman 2010). These emotional and behavioral impacts affect education; depression, behavior problems, poor social and emotional skills, and lack of self-control among children have been shown to negatively impact educational outcomes (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Duncan et al. 2007; McLeod and Kaiser 2004).

In addition to the emotional strain triggered by parent-child separation, children often experience financial strain as a result of their parent's incarceration. In state prisons, about half

of all mothers and three quarters of all fathers were employed prior to arrest (Glaze and Maruschak 2008; Mumola 2000). The incarceration of a parent intensifies the struggles of children and places a huge economic burden on the remaining parent or caregivers. Financial strain also extends beyond the loss of income—families of the incarcerated are also faced with the high cost of visitation and phone calls, legal costs, and a parent’s difficulty finding employment upon re-entry (Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999; McGowan and Blumenthal 1978; Travis and Waul 2003a). Foster and Hagan (2007) find that the strain of reduced family income does have an impact on the educational outcomes of children of prisoners. When family income following incarceration is included in their statistical model, the detaining effect of paternal incarceration on education is reduced (though not erased).

Although children of incarcerated parents are undoubtedly impacted by the family disruption and financial strain associated with the loss of a parent in general (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994), outcomes are worse for children of incarcerated parents than other children with absent parents. Research shows that the impacts of a parent’s incarceration on educational attainment persist even after accounting for a wide range of other factors that could produce similar types of strain, such as: absence of a parent from the household, parents’ psycho-social and deviant behaviors prior to incarceration, child-parent bond, poverty status, neighborhood characteristics, and childhood victimization and neglect (Foster and Hagan 2007, 2013; Haskins 2015).

### *School readiness and cognitive development as possible mechanisms*

Research using rich longitudinal data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study has shaped most of our current understanding of the effects of parental incarceration (specifically, paternal incarceration) on educational outcomes. This research shows that paternal

incarceration has a detrimental impact on both non-cognitive and cognitive functioning for school-aged children. These effects have implications for educational trajectories that could explain some of the long-term impacts of parental incarceration on educational outcomes revealed in earlier studies (Foster and Hagan 2007).

For boys, paternal incarceration is associated with increased physical aggression and decreased behavioral readiness for school at age five (Haskins 2014; Murray et al. 2012; Wildeman 2010). This impact on non-cognitive readiness contributes to a higher likelihood of placement in special education among boys with fathers who have been incarcerated (Haskins 2014). Further examination of children's behavioral functioning at age 9 confirms that paternal incarceration is detrimental to non-cognitive problem behaviors later in elementary school (Haskins 2015). These findings are important in light of evidence connecting disciplinary practices with educational outcomes—even if children are cognitively ready for school, behavioral problems can be barriers to academic achievement. School readiness sets the stage for a student's academic trajectory; therefore, low levels of education observed among young adults who have experienced parental incarceration are likely produced, in part, by the persistence of these early inequalities.

While the effects of paternal incarceration are limited to non-cognitive functioning among boys to age five, boys and girls display lower cognitive functioning at age 9. Recent research provides evidence that children who have experienced the incarceration of a father between age 1 and 9 tend to be about 1-2 months behind their peers in reading comprehension, math problem solving, and memory/attentional capacity. These effects vary by gender – with paternal incarceration having more of an impact on girls' reading comprehension and math problem solving, and on boys' memory/attentional capacity. The effects of paternal incarceration

are also stronger for white than black children, though the much higher concentration of paternal incarceration in black communities makes the effects on black children more pervasive (Haskins 2016). The deleterious effects of paternal incarceration on both behavior and cognition could explain some of the long-term impact on educational attainment.

### *Stigma as a possible mechanism*

Stigma is another mechanism through which parental incarceration may impact the educational outcome of children. It is widely accepted that children experience stigmatization as a result of their parent's incarceration, and that this is a feature of parental incarceration that makes it unique from other forms of parent-child separation (Braman 2004; Foster and Hagan 2007; Fritsch and Burkhead 1981; Hagen and Myers 2003; Hairston 2007; Lowenstein 1986; McGowan and Blumenthal 1978; Travis, Western, and Redburn 2014; Western and Wildeman 2009). There is also some indication that stigmatization influences educational experience of children with incarcerated parents. A 2010 study by Dallaire and colleagues found that teachers perceive girls as less competent if they know her mother is incarcerated (2010). Turney and Haskins (2014) found similar results with regard to paternal incarceration – teachers perceptions of academic capability mediate the positive effect of fathers' incarceration on early grade retention. Qualitative research also suggests that the psychological effects of stigmatization may play a role in the educational detainment of children of incarcerated parents (Knaphus 2010). These findings begin to shed light on the way stigma operates in the educational experience of children of incarcerated parents. There is evidence that the stigma discussed in a general way throughout the literature on parental incarceration could influence children through both external prejudice and the internal stress resulting from the “management of spoiled identity” (Goffman

1963). In the following chapter, I present a theoretical framework motivating my further exploration of the stigma of parental incarceration.

## Chapter 2: Theorizing the Stigma of Parental Incarceration

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The literature on parental incarceration frequently mentions the stigma associated with parental incarceration. It is broadly accepted by most scholars that children of incarcerated parents face stigmatization, and some have argued that the stigma attached to a parent's incarceration results in ostracism from peers, shame associated with the concealment of a parent's whereabouts, and disruption of close relationships with friends and family members. However, there is little empirical research describing the contours of this stigmatization. In this chapter, I discuss ways that stigma has been characterized in the literature on parental incarceration and construct a framework for understanding how stigma may operate in the educational experience of children with incarcerated parents. This framework informs the examination of stigma from two perspectives – that of individuals who have experienced parental incarceration themselves, and that of teachers tasked with addressing problem behavior among children of incarcerated parents.

### Defining stigma in relation to parental incarceration

The concept of stigma, as elucidated by Goffman (1963) and subsequently adopted by researchers across a wide range of disciplines, is most commonly described as a link between a particular attribute and a negative stereotype. In the case of parental incarceration, the stigmatizing attribute is a characteristic ascribed through association with a parent who has been “marked” as a criminal (Pager 2003, 2007). Goffman (1963: 30) explains that “[t]he problems faced by stigmatized persons spread out in waves, but of diminishing intensity.” Research shows that people related to stigmatized individuals, in either meaningful or coincidental ways, are devalued. The transfer of stigma from the primary target to those around (typically referred to as

associative stigma, stigma by association, or courtesy stigma) occurs both reflexively and deliberately – even arbitrary associations, such as standing next to a fat person in a public place, can trigger negative reactions. When there is a meaningful social relationship between a stigmatized individual and their companion, these negative associations are more likely to be made explicit – “meaningful connections make it ‘reasonable’ to assume that some aspect of a stigma is somehow shared among companions” (Pryor, Reeder, and Monroe 2012, 231). . Through this associative process, children of incarcerated parents come to share the negative stereotypes linked with their parent’s status as a “criminal.”

Goffman’s conceptualization of stigma as a link between an individual attribute and a negative stereotype is useful for explaining how attributes become stigmatizing markers, and how stereotypes become attached to these stigmatizing markers, but less useful for explaining the practical consequences of stigmatization (Link and Phelan 2001). Link and Phelan (2001) further argue that power is an important element missing from most discussions of stigma (see also Operario and Fiske 1998). Their conceptualization frames stigmatization as an interactive process, highlighting the importance of context and accounting for variation in the experience of stigmatization for individuals as they navigate through different social spaces (Phillips and Gates 2011). They suggest the term be used “when elements of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination co-occur in a power situation that allows the components of stigma to unfold” (Link and Phelan 2001).

Phillips and Gates (2011) use Link and Phelan’s framework to illustrate how the stigmatization of children of incarcerated parents occurs. These authors argue that children of incarcerated parents have been *labeled* as a distinct group, largely as a result of growing attention from researchers and policy makers. Indeed, the phrase “intergenerational cycle of incarceration”

appears frequently in discussions of parental incarceration. For example, Washington passed legislation in 2005 and 2007 to create supports for children of incarcerated parents with a goal to “reduce recidivism and intergenerational incarceration” (Christian 2009). While typically used in the context of promoting efforts to help these “at risk” youth, drawing attention to the potential negative impacts of parental incarceration could have the unintentional side-effect of perpetuating negative *stereotypes* of children of incarcerated parents. Associating children with their parent’s criminality can perpetuate notions that “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” Whatever the intentions, identifying children of incarcerated parents as a distinct group results in othering—creating social distance between children of incarcerated parents and their peers. According to Link and Phelan (2001), the *separation* of “us” from “them” occurs when labels are linked to undesirable attributes, and labeled persons come to be seen as fundamentally different. As Phillips and Gates (2011) note, in the context of parental incarceration, this differentiation is deeply intertwined with stigmatization based on race. The presence of multiple stigmatizing markers can reinforce stereotypical beliefs and serve to deepen the divide between “us” and “them.”

Among children of incarcerated parents, *status loss and discrimination* may occur as a result of internalized stigma or external prejudice. An obvious example of external prejudice resulting from parental incarceration is bullying/harassment by peers, but status loss can also occur as a result of more subtle forms of differential treatment – for example, pity expressed by efforts to provide extra help or lenience for children of incarcerated parents that can result in devaluation. Regardless of whether/how children of incarcerated parents are treated differently from their peers, the fear of shame or discrimination can have powerful psychological effects, as can the internalization of stereotypes associated with a stigmatized status (Phillips and Gates

2011). The current research focuses on both external and internal dimensions of the stigmatization of children of incarcerated parents, examining how status loss and discrimination occur in schools—a prime example of a *power situation*.

## Stigma in the parental incarceration literature

Social psychologists generally discuss the effects of stigma as occurring along two dimensions – outwardly, as others exhibit bias against stigmatized individuals (stigma from the perceiver’s perspective), and inwardly, as stigmatized individuals cope with/internalize their stigmatized status (stigma from the target’s perspective). Studies on the effects of parental incarceration have approached the issue of stigma from both perspectives. Much of the research in this area has relied on ethnographic data and reports of caregivers—data that lends itself to discussions of stigma from the target’s perspective (for example, see: Braman 2002, 2004; Comfort 2002; Fritsch and Burkhead 1981; McGowan and Blumenthal 1978). More recently, scholars have begun to examine the judgments other people make of children of incarcerated parents (stigma from the perceiver’s perspective) (Dallaire et al. 2010; Turney and Haskins 2014; Wildeman et al. 2017). In the remainder of this chapter I will provide an overview of how stigma has been discussed in the children of incarcerated parents, and supplement this with theory from social psychology to build a framework for understanding how stigma could impact the educational experience of children of incarcerated parents.

In his ethnography of prisoners’ families in Washington DC, Braman (2004) found that families of incarcerated people experience as much or more stigmatization than prisoners themselves. Even in communities where incarceration is commonplace, people hold onto ideals of a “normal” family and fully recognize the stigma of incarceration. While loss of a family member due to death or divorce typically elicits a sympathetic response from one’s social circle,

families often find that personal relationships suffer subsequent to a parent's incarceration (Bernstein 2005; Braman 2004; Fritsch and Burkhead 1981; Hairston 2007; Western and Wildeman 2009). Rather than finding support and solidarity in their communities, they feel obliged to keep the incarceration of their family member secret (Braman 2002, 2004; Fritsch and Burkhead 1981; Hagen and Myers 2003; Hairston 2007; Johnston 1995; McGowan and Blumenthal 1978). Whereas the effects of stigmatization on inmates are often mitigated by their relationship with other incarcerated and hence stigmatized people, family members "live and work outside the prison setting and are exposed to the judgment of their neighbors, churchgoers, co-workers, supervisors, employers, and other community members" (Braman 2004:174). Goffman describes this type of dilemma as follows: "...the individual with a courtesy stigma may find that he must suffer many of the standard deprivations of his courtesy group and yet not be able to enjoy the self-elevation which is a common defense against such treatment." (Goffman 1963:31).

Braman's findings (2004) call into question other studies that suggest stigma does not significantly affect children of prisoners. Johnston (1995) argues that stigma is a concern among the caregivers of children of incarcerated parents, but research conducted up through the early 1990s had not revealed this to be a strong contributor to the adverse effects of parental incarceration. According to Johnston, stigma is not a major concern for children of incarcerated parents because incarceration is now commonplace in many of the communities where these children live (also see Nagin 1998; Schwartz and Weintraub 1974). This argument is echoed by Arditti (2015), who suggests that the effects of maternal incarceration on children are less strong for children in highly disadvantaged family contexts because it is less stigmatized in communities where it is more likely to occur.

On the contrary, Braman's and other ethnographic accounts indicate that the impact of stigma on children of prisoners is profound. "Juggling feelings and answering questions about how a 'bad guy' can still be a good parent present enormous challenges for children of any age" (Braman 2004:21). Children have a hard time discussing the incarceration of a parent with adults or peers for fear of being ostracized or inaccurately labeled as delinquent (Bernstein 2005; Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999; Park and Clarke-Stewart 2003). Additionally, perceived stigma often causes caregivers to struggle with the decisions of if, when, and how to tell children the whereabouts of their incarcerated parent (Braman 2004; Comfort 2008; Hairston 2003). Some caregivers are so reluctant to discuss the issue of incarceration with children that they tell them their parent is away for another reason, such as the army, school, or work (Hairston 2003; Johnston 1995). When they do disclose the location of a parent, they often give the child cues that their parent's incarceration is not to be discussed with people outside the family (Johnston 1995).

Emerging research provides evidence that feelings of external judgement and desire to keep details about a parent's incarceration are well-founded. There is evidence that the stigma of parental incarceration influences teacher perceptions of students' academic proficiency, and that this contributes to higher rates of early grade retention among children of incarcerated fathers (Dallaire et al. 2010; Turney and Haskins 2014). A recent experimental study by (Wildeman et al. 2017) also shows that teachers are more likely to expect problem behavior from a student if they believe that the student's father is incarcerated. This suggests that children of incarcerated parents do, in fact, share the negative stereotypes linked with their parent's status as a "criminal."

In sum, stigmatization is mentioned frequently in the literature on parental incarceration, and it is generally accepted that children are impacted by the stigma of incarceration. However,

there has been little focus on the distinction between internalized stigma and external prejudice. Though there is emerging research that examines the latter, much of the literature has focused on perceptions of stigma from the perspective of children of incarcerated parents and its internalized effects. Further, research on the impacts of parental incarceration suggests much more heterogeneity in stigmatization and its effects than is recognized in the literature. A discussion of the ways that these two dimensions of stigma have been conceptualized in the social psychological literature informs my hypotheses regarding the stigmatization of children with incarcerated parents in an educational setting.

### **Internalized effects of the stigma of parental incarceration**

Goffman (1963) was primarily concerned with examining the internal effects of stigma; he wanted to understand how stigmatized individuals negotiate social situations and manage their “spoiled identities.” While much of the social psychological research following Goffman has focused on external prejudice/discrimination, there is a growing body of research that focuses on the perspective of those with stigmas (Swim and Stangor 1998). This research shows that stigmatized individuals can suffer from lowered self-esteem, psychological distress, and social withdrawal. The impacts of stigma on psychological wellbeing and social withdrawal can subsequently influence educational experience. Lee and Shute (2010) conducted a review of the literature identifying psychological constructs related to academic achievement. They discuss evidence that emotional/affective engagement with school/learning, and attachment to peers can both influence academic achievement.

Although researchers often focus on individuals with outwardly visible “marks” of their stigma, those with concealable stigmas are also affected (Goffman 1963). Smart and Wegner

(2000) report that concealment can lead to pre-occupation with one's stigmatized status, leading to inner turmoil and possible effects on long-term social relationships. Those with concealable stigmas tend to have lower self-esteem and higher levels of anxiety and depression than both their conspicuous stigmatized and non-stigmatized peers (Frable, Platt, and Hoey 1998). Research shows that both people with personal concealable stigma and people with courtesy stigma struggle with feelings of shame and distress over disclosing their stigmatized identity (Quinn and Chaudoir 2009).

Research on the internalized effects of stigma shows that its negative effects can vary widely based on situational and personal factors (Crocker and Quinn 2000; Inzlicht and Good 2006; Major and Schmader 1998; Miller 2006). For example, Crocker and Major's (1989) theory of the self-protective properties of stigma posits that perceptions of prejudice can mitigate the negative effect of stigma on self-esteem (see also Major, Kaiser, and McCoy 2003). In addition to perceptions of prejudice, the negative psychological impacts of concealable stigmatization are mediated by the degree to which the stigmatized status is culturally devalued, the degree to which people anticipate they will be devalued based on their stigma (the level of perceived or anticipated stigma), the salience of the identity, the centrality of the stigma to the self, and the presence of similar others (Quinn and Chaudoir 2009; Frable, Platt, and Hoey 1998). Moreover, the effects of stigma are not a stable trait – they can manifest in a variety of ways for the same individual across different immediate social contexts (Crocker 1999).

In addition to its impacts on psychological distress, research shows that stigmatization can directly affect academic achievement. The stereotype threat perspective argues that stigmatized individuals will subconsciously behave in stereotype-congruent ways, even if they don't agree with the stereotypes attached to their group (Steele and Aronson 1995). Pinel's

concept of “stigma consciousness” compliments stereotype threat, and is consistent with Quinn and Chaudoir’s (2009) findings regarding variation in the impacts of stigmatization. While “[s]tereotype threat refers to a concern about one’s own behavior (e.g., “Am I going to confirm the stereotype?”), high levels of stigma consciousness reflect an expectation that one will be stereotyped, irrespective of one’s actual behavior” (Pinel 1999:115). Pinel argues that some people expect to be stereotyped more than others based on their stigmatized status, and that this contributes to an increased likelihood that they will confirm stereotypes about their groups. In addition, people high in stigma consciousness are more likely to perceive discrimination directed toward them, and more likely to avoid stereotype-relevant situations.

In a prior study of the long-term impacts of parental incarceration, I found that children often feel stigmatized as a result of their parents’ incarceration, but that there is a great deal of variation in the degree to which this occurs (Knaphus 2010). Consistent with previous findings regarding variation in the impacts of stigma (Pinel 1999; Quinn and Chaudoir 2009), respondents in my study who were acutely aware of the stigma attached to their parent’s incarceration seemed to be impacted more by their stigmatized status than those who were not. Several respondents with high levels of “stigma consciousness” indicated that the courtesy stigma they experienced led to social withdrawal and isolation from peers and schools. For these individuals, the social impacts of stigmatization had a considerable impact on their academic engagement. Feeling ostracized by their peers caused them to dislike school, and in some cases led them to stop going. While the design of this study and small sample size prevent me from drawing firm conclusions regarding the role of stigma consciousness or stereotype threat, the lower level of educational attainment among respondents who were more acutely aware of their stigmatized status suggests that there may be an association between the two (Knaphus 2010).

Theory regarding the internalized effects of stigma suggests how the stigma of parental incarceration could impact the educational experience of children. First, children are not expected to experience the stigma of parental incarceration in a uniform manner. The experience of stigmatization will vary greatly between individuals and within the same individual across different contexts. Second, the effects of stigma on educational experience will depend on the degree to which children feel they are stigmatized and on their subsequent response to perceptions of stigma. While stigma is often thought to affect self-esteem and lead to social withdrawal and disengagement with school, this is more likely to occur for children who are acutely aware of the stigma of their parent's incarceration. And third, there is some research suggesting that children will be insulated from the psychological effects of stigma if they perceive prejudice based on their stigmatized status.

## Parental incarceration and discrimination

Social psychologists and stratification scholars have paid a great deal of attention to bias against stigmatized groups. This literature examines why and how individuals form prejudiced opinions, how prejudice shapes behaviors, and how discrimination contributes to social inequality. In an era when overt discrimination has come to be seen as socially unacceptable and, in most cases, illegal, recent research on stigma from this perspective has focused a great deal on implicit or aversive bias (Bargh, Chen, and Burrows 1996; Dovidio and Gaertner 1998; Eberhardt et al. 2004; Goff et al. 2008; Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz 1998). Most of this research has focused on discrimination against people of color, people with disabilities, and women. These studies help inform hypotheses regarding implicit attitudes toward children of incarcerated parents and potential interactions between race and parental incarceration in an educational setting. While unconscious bias seems like a difficult concept to measure,

researchers have been able to uncover its effects through experimental and quasi-experimental design.

Subconscious priming and implicit association tests are frequently used by experimental social psychologists to measure unconscious bias. Experiments measuring implicit bias have consistently shown that unconscious racism is pervasive, regardless of self-reported attitudes regarding egalitarianism. The implicit association between blackness and criminality found in these types of studies is particularly interesting in the context of the current project. Eberhardt et al. (2004) found evidence that police officers tend to see stereotypically black faces as more criminal than white faces, and are more likely to conjure images of black faces when subconsciously primed with crime-related words. Moreover, research conducted by Goff et al. (2008) shows that people tend to associate blacks with apes, and that this dehumanization may influence the death sentencing decisions of jurors. These authors found that black defendants in death penalty cases were more frequently described in the press with ape-related words than white defendants. The association of blackness with criminality and dehumanization of blacks could have implications for the treatment of black students in a school setting. Therefore, it will be important to allow race to interact with parental incarceration when looking at the relationship between parental incarceration and teacher's perceptions.

Quasi-experimental methods have also been utilized by sociologists to reveal bias based on race and criminal record among public officials and employers (Pager 2003, 2007; Schram et al. 2009). Devah Pager's research on the employment barriers faced by blacks and ex-convicts provides strong evidence of the stratifying effects of stigmatization. In an audit study of employers, Pager found that men with a (reported) felony conviction are one half to one third as likely to be considered by potential employers as men with no criminal record. Perhaps more

surprisingly, it was found that the effect of race was extremely large—the effect of having a criminal record was larger for blacks than for whites, and blacks with no criminal record were less likely to receive a callback than whites with a criminal record (Pager 2003, 2007). These findings are similar to psychological research showing that people respond more negatively to images of black than white people when they are represented as prisoners (Barden et al. 2004). Pager attributes the black-white difference in employer decisions to an association of black with criminal. Within this framework, the courtesy stigma of a criminal record extends to an entire racial group (see also Harris, Evans, and Beckett 2011).

Just as race and criminal background influence employment decisions, research shows that race/ethnicity can play a role in sanctioning decisions made by criminal justice officials and welfare case workers. Schram et al. (2009) used a vignette study to examine the role that race plays in decisions to impose sanctions on non-compliant welfare recipients. This study showed that case workers were more likely to impose sanctions on Black and Latina clients, especially when these clients displayed stereotype-congruent behavior.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Bridges and Steen (1998) describe how race can contribute to disparities in the punishment of juvenile offenders. These authors show that the delinquent behavior of black youths is more likely to be seen by probation officers as originating from internal characteristics, while the delinquent behavior of white youths is more likely to be attributed to environmental factors. These authors argue that the internal attribution of blame contributes to racial disparities in sentencing.<sup>4</sup> Official decision-making regarding sanctions reflects racial bias in opinions regarding appropriate punishments

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<sup>3</sup> Harris et al. (2011) and Jones and Kaplan (2003) also show that displaying stereotype-congruent behavior can contribute to the imposition of harsher sanctions.

<sup>4</sup> Young (1991) found that support for capital punishment is greater among individuals who attribute blame to individual rather than environmental characteristics.

held by the general public. A factorial survey conducted by Applegate et al. (1994) showed that the race of a defendant has a significant impact on the support for capital punishment (see also Goff et al. 2008).

Racial disparities in punishment also extend to school discipline. There is some evidence that stereotypes about young black males held by teachers and administrators (and possibly internalized by students themselves) contribute to disparities in discipline (Ferguson 2000; Horner et al. 2010). Scholars have begun to draw parallels between the disproportionate punishment of young black boys in schools and young black men in the criminal justice system, arguing that the criminalization of black masculinity shapes teachers' perceptions and contributes to disparities in discipline (Ferguson 2000; Monroe 2005; Noguera 2003; Nolan 2011). The disparities in discipline are especially pronounced in cases where there is ambiguity about the appropriate punishment for a particular behavior (such as "repeated classroom disruption") and teachers/administrators are allowed considerable discretion (Nolan 2011; Skiba et al. 2002, 2011; Vavrus and Cole 2002). This suggests that bias on the part of teachers and administrators might play a role in driving disparities in discipline.

#### *Indications of bias against children of incarcerated parents*

Although there is a plethora of research illustrating the ubiquity of racial/ethnic disparities in school discipline, researchers have not examined whether perceptions of the "intergenerational cycle of incarceration" impact disciplinary decisions regarding children of incarcerated parents. There is evidence that parental incarceration has a measurable effect on problem behavior, particularly among young boys with incarcerated fathers. Studies vary somewhat in their findings regarding interactions with race, age, and gender, but a father's incarceration is consistently shown to be associated with aggressive behavior in boys (Craigie

2011; Geller et al. 2012; Haskins 2014, 2015; Johnson 2009; Murray et al. 2012; Perry and Bright 2012; Wakefield and Wildeman 2014; Wildeman 2010). There is also some indication that fathers' incarceration is associated with a higher risk of arrest and conviction among male adolescents and young adults (Murray et al. 2012; Roettger and Swisher 2011; Van de Rakt, Murray, and Nieuwebeerta 2012). However, little is known about the way that perceptions of and response to problem behavior are shaped by parental incarceration.

Foster and Hagan (2007) measured the effect of discrimination on children of incarcerated parents within the criminal justice system by including measures of self-reported behavior and institutional responses in their statistical analysis. These authors incorporate the concept of stigmatization into a broader state sanctioning and dependency framework, in which "arrest in adolescent and young adulthood transmits and combines with the effects of father's imprisonment to detain children's early adult educational attainment, which can lead to further early adult exclusion" (Foster and Hagan 2007:404). This approach acknowledges that children of incarcerated parents might be punished more harshly than their peers, but only examines children's treatment within the criminal justice system (and not within schools) as indicators of this cumulative process.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In their study of the effects of parental incarceration on offending later in life, Murray and Farrington (2005) found that there were not biases in convictions based on parental incarceration. This suggests that parental incarceration might not play a significant role in the treatment of offenders once they have entered the criminal justice system. However, using measures of children's own contact with the criminal justice system does not account for the courtesy stigma that may be experienced by children of prisoners not directly involved in criminal activity. An investigation of the impact of parental incarceration on school disciplinary decisions might reveal that the stigma of parental incarceration affects how adolescents are selected into the criminal justice system, rather than how they are treated once they are a part of it.

Disparities in outcomes between children of incarcerated parents and their similarly-situated peers is often attributed to stigma, but empirical examination of this dimension of the experience of parental incarceration is limited. However, studies have shown that teachers are biased against children of incarcerated parents in their estimation of students' academic abilities (Dallaire et al. 2010; Turney and Haskins 2014). Emerging research extends this line of inquiry to behavior and provides evidence that teachers are biased against children of incarcerated parents in their expectations of problem behavior (Wildeman et al. 2017). The current study will examine whether this bias also translates to a difference in the attributions of and responses to problem behavior among teachers.

In summary, the literature shows that race can play a role in decisions about punishment, both in the context of criminal justice and school discipline. There is also evidence that disparities in discipline can contribute to disparities in academic outcomes. Therefore, it is possible that school discipline plays a role in the educational detainment of children of incarcerated parents. The literature suggests three hypotheses regarding the impact of parental incarceration on the educational experience of children. First, teachers will be more likely to attribute problem behavior among children of incarcerated parents to internal rather than environmental characteristics due to stereotypical assumptions that "the apple doesn't fall from the tree" (the transference of a parent's stigma to their children). Second, these attributions will contribute to harsher punishment for children of incarcerated parents than their peers. Third, the effect of parental incarceration on teacher responses to problem behavior will be particularly pronounced for black males displaying stereotype-congruent behavior.

## Summary of hypotheses and contribution of research

The theoretical framework developed here suggests six hypotheses regarding the internal and external effects of stigma on the educational experience of children. From the perspective of children of incarcerated parents:

- 1) Stigmatization is expected to vary greatly between individuals and within the same individual across different contexts.
- 2) The effects of stigma on educational experience should depend on the degree to which children feel they are stigmatized and on their subsequent response to perceptions of stigma.
- 3) The psychological effects of stigma should be less extreme if they perceive prejudice based on their stigmatized status.

And from the perspective of teachers:

- 4) Teachers will be more likely to attribute problem behavior among children of incarcerated parents to internal rather than environmental characteristics due to stereotypical assumptions that “the apple doesn’t fall from the tree” (the transference of a parent’s stigma to their children).
- 5) These attributions will contribute to harsher punishment for children of incarcerated parents than their peers.
- 6) The effect of parental incarceration on teacher responses to problem behavior will be particularly pronounced for black males displaying stereotype-congruent behavior.

This dissertation will employ a mixed-methods approach to explore these six hypotheses. Qualitative insights from 36 youth and young adults who have experienced the incarceration of a parent will allow me to engage with the first three hypotheses. While the nature of qualitative

research does not lend itself to hypothesis testing per se, it does allow for a nuanced examination of variations in the experience of stigmatization. A factorial survey of teachers will be used to test hypotheses 4-6. In combination, these two approaches will provide a unique opportunity to put internal experiences of stigma in conversation with measures of external bias. In addition to developing an in-depth description of the experience of stigmatization from the perspective of children of incarcerated parents, the mixed-methods approach will enable me to empirically test whether one dimension of the stigma anticipated/perceived by children is echoed in the attitudes and anticipated behaviors of teachers.

## **PART II**

## Chapter 3: Qualitative Data & Methods

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### Data

Qualitative methods are well-suited for examining the subjective experience of people in marginalized groups and uncovering how individuals believe they are impacted by social structures/institutions/policies. Large-scale survey research often overlooks populations that are small in number, hard to reach, or otherwise rendered invisible by systematic exclusion from social surveys (see Pettit 2012). Qualitative research can help shed light on the experiences of people in marginalized populations who are impacted in intricate ways by public policies (Katz 1997). For example, ethnographic and interview research has helped to uncover the pervasive influence of the civil and criminal justice systems in the lives of economically marginalized people, especially people of color (Beckett and Herbert 2010; Braman 2002, 2004, Comfort 2002, 2007, 2008; Goffman 2009). My research continues this tradition, further illuminating the impact of the criminal justice system on people who are not the intended targets of punishment.

The qualitative data for this project were collected in two stages.<sup>6</sup> The first stage consisted of 20 semi-structured interviews with individuals aged 18-40 who experienced the incarceration of a parent when they were young. These interviews took place in from Fall 2009 through Spring 2010. Respondents were recruited via flyers posted in community centers, syringe exchange facilities, homeless shelters, drop-in centers, public health clinics, prison re-entry programs, prison visiting rooms, coffee shops, gyms, libraries, and college campuses throughout Seattle, Washington and surrounding areas. An advertisement for the study was also placed on craigslist.org. Of the 20 interviewees, eight found out about the study on craigslist.org,

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<sup>6</sup> Note: IRB approval was obtained through the University of Washington Human Subjects Division for all aspects of data collection

three saw fliers at homeless shelters, three were found through recruitment efforts on the University of Washington Seattle campus, two saw fliers at a syringe exchange, one saw a flier at a young adult drop-in center, and three found out about the study through an unknown process.

The second stage of qualitative data collection was conducted in collaboration with Project WHAT! (We're Here and Talking!), a program that works with youth and young adults in the San Francisco Bay Area who have experienced the incarceration of a parent. The goal of this program is to inform teachers, service providers, policy makers, and community members of the struggles faced by children of incarcerated parents. Most participants find out about the program through other programs for "at risk" youth, school counsellors, peers involved in the program, teachers, and social media campaigns. Youth formally apply to the program, and once selected they are employed by Project WHAT! and receive compensation for time spent in weekly group meetings and presentations. Throughout April of 2013, I conducted two focus groups and eleven individual interviews with participants in the program. I also observed regular group meetings, youth leadership meetings, and presentations the group gave about the experience of parental incarceration.

Focus groups were an appropriate tool to use within this context, because the aim was to uncover variations in the way that people have experienced an event they hold in common. The dynamic nature of focus groups allows for synergism and spontaneity that is absent in individual interviews—one participant's comments can spark a memory or idea in another participant, participants can encourage each other to disclose personal details, and responses may be more genuine because participants don't feel pressured to answer every question that is asked (Frey and Fontana 1991; Hoppe et al. 1995; Kitzinger 1994; Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub 1996). Additionally, the group format allows participants to help in the analysis of the data as they go

along. Rather than the researcher piecing together a story of how the experiences of individuals compare to each other while sitting at a computer and analyzing transcripts, the researcher can ask participants to compare their experiences themselves (Morgan 1996). Group interviews also provide researchers with the opportunity to field hypotheses they've generated and see if their subjects agree with the conclusions they've drawn (Frey and Fontana 1991).

Some researchers argue that caution should be used when conducting focus groups consisting of people who already know each other because they may be less likely to disclose sensitive information, have existing power relations that could inhibit discussion, or use subtle forms of communication that are difficult for the researcher to detect/analyze (Krueger 1994). However, Frey and Fontana (1991) argue that informal and formal group interviews conducted within a field setting are a useful technique for getting clarification and elaboration on observations or ideas that came up in individual interviews. In the context of Project WHAT!, group members are encouraged to speak openly about their thoughts and feelings, and are accustomed to sharing their experiences with others outside the group, so the comfort level around open disclosure was not as significant a problem as it might be in other settings (such as families or companies). In this case, the benefits of group interviews outweigh the drawbacks.

The focus groups each lasted for 90 minutes, the length of a normal Project WHAT! program meeting. In total, thirteen Project WHAT! youth participated in one or both of the focus groups. In the focus groups, participants were prompted to discuss differences and commonalities in the experience of parental incarceration. Among other topics, participants shared their ideas about the unique features of parental incarceration, ways parental incarceration impacted their life trajectories, assumptions people make about children of incarcerated parents, and what it has been like to speak openly about parental incarceration as part of Project WHAT!.

While group interviews worked well for generating the flow of ideas, individual interviews with eleven Project WHAT! participants added depth and biographical context to the themes drawn from observations and group interviews. These interviews also generated data to be put in conversation with data collected in stage one.

I conducted a total of 31 semi-structured interviews that lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Respondents were provided monetary compensation before the interviews began (participants in stage one were given \$16 compensation for their time, and Project WHAT! participants were given \$10 for individual interviews that took place outside of their regular Project WHAT! hours). The interviews took place in various locations throughout Western Washington and the Bay Area, mostly in coffee shops, study rooms in college libraries, malls, and the Project WHAT! office. Respondents were asked open-ended questions about their lives before, during, and after the incarceration of their parent. They were also asked questions about the relationship they had with their incarcerated parent, what sort of contact they had during incarceration, and social support they received during and after their parent's incarceration. Interviews concluded with a series of questions aimed at exploring individuals' perceptions of the impact of parental incarceration on their own criminal behavior, education, employment, and relationships as they entered adulthood. They were also asked to give their impressions of how parental incarceration might be different than loss of a parent for another reason. While respondents were not directly asked questions about the stigma of parental incarceration, they were asked to describe how they believe children of incarcerated parents are viewed in general, and whether they ever felt that they were treated differently than others around them as a result of their parent's incarceration. Project WHAT! participants were also asked to discuss how they have been impacted by their participation in the program.

Table 1 provides information about the participation of Project WHAT! youth in each of the research activities. Nine of the eleven individual interview respondents also participated in focus groups (the other two were former Project WHAT! employees, and did not attend regular group meetings where the focus groups took place). Five youth took part in the focus groups, but did not agree to individual interviews. Four youth were involved in Project WHAT! presentations I observed during my time with the group – one for a girls’ leadership group, one for a small group of teachers and students at a middle school, and one in a public health class at a community college.

*Table 1: Project WHAT! research participation*

<b>Name<sup>7</sup></b>	<b>Individual Interview</b>	<b>Focus Group 1</b>	<b>Focus Group 2</b>	<b>Presentation 1</b>	<b>Presentation 2</b>	<b>Presentation 3</b>
Abraham		X	X			
Alex	X					
Bianca	X	X				
Jada	X	X	X			
Jasmine	X	X	X		X	
Keisha	X					
Marcus		X				X
Miguel		X	X			
Monique		X	X	X		
Naliah	X	X				
Naomi	X	X	X	X	X	X
Raven	X		X			
Rickey		X	X			
Shantell	X	X				
Tamira	X					
Trisha	X	X	X			

Descriptive information about the research participants is presented in Table 2. The sample was pretty evenly divided between women (53%) and men (47%). The average age of

<sup>7</sup> Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of research participants

respondents who reported this information (N=31) was 22.58 years old, with Project WHAT! participants being younger on average than non-Project WHAT! participants (17.27 years as opposed to 25.5 years). A majority of respondents who provided information about race/ethnicity identified as non-white (61%). Among non-white respondents, most identified as black or African American (39%). Of those who identified as multi-racial (14%), most described their race/ethnicity as a mix of white and/or black and/or Latinx. The racial composition of Project WHAT! group was quite different from the group of respondents interviewed in the Seattle area—most black respondents were Project WHAT! participants, and most white participants were part of the first wave of data collection in the Seattle area. An overwhelming majority of respondents had experienced paternal rather than maternal incarceration, which makes sense given that most people incarcerated in the US are men. About two thirds respondents described their parents as being in and out of jail/prison throughout their childhood, but the average age at the time of their parent’s first incarceration after their birth was 5.5 years old.

*Table 2: Qualitative respondent demographics*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Non-Project WHAT!</b>	<b>Project WHAT!</b>	<b>Total</b>
Gender			
<i>woman</i>	8 (40%)	11	19(53%)
<i>man</i>	12 (60%)	5	17 (47%)
Age (average)	25.5	17.3	22.58
Race/ethnicity			
<i>black</i>	2 (10%)	12 (75%)	14 (39%)
<i>Latinx</i>	2 (10%)	1 (6%)	3 (8%)
<i>multiracial</i>	3 (15%)	2 (13%)	5 (14%)
<i>white</i>	13 (65%)	1 (6%)	14 (39%)
Parent incarcerated			
<i>father</i>	20 (100%)	11 (69%)	31 (86%)
<i>mother</i>	0	1 (6%)	1 (3%)
<i>both</i>	0	4 (25%)	4 (11%)
Child age at parent’s initial incarceration	5.2	6.1	5.5

## Analytic method

Interviews, focus groups, and observation notes were first transcribed and then coded and analyzed using NVivo software. A coding scheme was developed inductively based on commonly occurring themes and themes relevant to existing literature. The overall goal of this project was to uncover respondents' perceptions of stigma, particularly in an educational setting. From this perspective, codes such as "apple doesn't fall far from the tree," "educational experience," and "teacher perceptions" emerged. I also created codes based on themes deemed relevant based on the social psychological and parental incarceration literatures, such as "secondary prisonization," "pity," and "chaos." The analysis of the data was an iterative process – new coding schemes were developed as insights from the data emerged through analytic memos. For example, after developing initial impressions regarding the heterogeneity of the experience of stigmatization, details about this variation were further revealed through additional coding for contextual factors and choices about disclosure. Through this iterative process, patterns were revealed that helped to describe the contours of stigmatization experienced by children of incarcerated parents.

The qualitative analysis is presented in two chapters – Chapter 4 illustrates various ways stigmatization is characterized by children of incarcerated parents, and how choices to disclose information about a parent's incarceration illuminate variation in the experience of stigma across contexts. Chapter 5 focuses on how children responded in different ways with the incarceration of their parent, and the role of stigma in producing these responses. Together, these chapters provide an overview of the nature of stigmatization and set the stage for Part III, which examines the external judgements teachers make of children of incarcerated parents.

## Chapter 4: Variations in the Stigma of Parental Incarceration

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Research on parental incarceration reveals that children are aware of the stigma attached to their parent's incarceration, and these feelings are reinforced by messages from parents and caregivers that information about their parent's whereabouts should be kept secret (Braman 2004; Fritsch and Burkhead 1981; Hagen and Myers 2003; Hairston 2007; Johnston 1995; McGowan and Blumenthal 1978). Moreover, survey research provides evidence that teachers have lower expectations of children of incarcerated parents, and these expectations may contribute to higher rates of grade retention for young children (Turney and Haskins 2014; Wildeman et al. 2017). However, current knowledge regarding heterogeneity in the stigma of parental incarceration is limited. This chapter describes the intricacies of the experience of stigma by examining how perceptions of stigma vary in the qualitative accounts of youth and young adults who have experienced parental incarceration.

Drawing from individual and group interviews involving thirty-six individuals who had a parent incarcerated at some point throughout their childhood, this chapter examines the following questions: 1) How do children of incarcerated parents characterize the stigma of parental incarceration? 2) What factors influence feelings of stigmatization? How are decisions about disclosure impacted by context? Do people feel the stigma of parental incarceration more acutely in some situations than in others? 3) How does the stigma of parental incarceration interact with other stigmatized statuses? 4) Do respondents feel as though they have been judged by others based on their status as the child of an incarcerated parent? In their experience, what form did this stigmatization take? The term "stigma" was not used in interview protocols and was rarely used by respondents. However, discussions of stereotypes associated with parental incarceration, the shame and embarrassment of parental incarceration, and careful navigation

regarding disclosure of a parent's whereabouts suggest that the concept of stigma is an appropriate framework for interpreting the experiences of parental incarceration described below.

## Variations in the characterization of stigma

As would be expected based on the ubiquity of references to stigma in the literature on parental incarceration, a majority of children of incarcerated parents interviewed for this study discussed impressions that parental incarceration affects the way children are perceived by others around them or society at large. About two thirds of research participants indicated that they believe people make certain judgements/assumptions about children of incarcerated parents. These respondents acknowledged that, whether or not they felt as though they were personally impacted by the stigma of their parent's incarceration, children of incarcerated parents as a group are devalued because of their parent's "criminal" status. While they weren't directly asked about specific stereotypes associated with parental incarceration, thoughts about how society views children of incarcerated parents surfaced in almost half of the interviews. For example:

Naliah: Like, they think we're, like, children of incarcerated parents, they think we're gonna fail and become just like our parents, in jail.

Jasmine: They would just be like, I don't know, "don't trust her in the classroom by herself, she's gonna take something."

As reflected in these statements, perceptions of the stigma of parental incarceration typically indicated an intergenerational transmission of criminality. Though there was a great deal of variation in the lived experience of stigmatization at a personal level, as will be discussed in the sections that follow, there was broad agreement about the views held by society at large regarding children of incarcerated parents.

While most respondents expressed the belief that children of incarcerated parents as a group are devalued, a small handful did not give any indication that they were aware of assumptions people make about children of incarcerated parents. Seth and Stephanie felt that rather than being a stigmatizing marker, parental incarceration was more like a badge of honor – something that made them interesting and cool. Julie said that her sister reflected the same sentiments. In this way, they implied that children of incarcerated parents were “othered,” but not in a way that was socially devalued. Seth, Stephanie, and Julie explain this positive “othering” as follows:

Emily: do you remember talking about the incarceration of your father with any of your friends or family members?

Seth: Um, uh, I remember- yeah, at least one of my friends I definitely talked to about it. I mean, more than just bragging and telling him.

Stephanie: And I think that what I knew, you know, especially if they were my friends, what I knew I was more than happy to talk about it. Like, not a lot of kids have their parents go to jail. And I always wanted to be liked. There were really mean kids. I wasn't that popular in school at all, and, you know, I wanted to be liked and it was a cool story. You know. Dad went to jail for robbing banks, how cool is that? Not really that cool, but it's a cool story. Even now, like, the people I know now, “hey, your dad went to jail? What'd he do? Oh, he robbed a bunch of banks, really?” So I think it was just kind of like that.

Julie: I think it's had a slightly different effect on my sister. Like sometimes I think that she's kind of like slightly romanticized his like criminal history, is my impression. 'Cause she's like, she's been doing this ancestry stuff and she found out that one of our ancestors used to be a sheriff of a town, and then they robbed the town and fled with it and she's like “ha ha, we have a criminal history.” And I was like “oh” (laugh) I was like “this isn't a good thing.” (laugh)

Other respondents, like Jada, did not express this opinion but knew that others around them did – “...where I grew up, it's like a good thing - ‘oh, well they big and bad.’” For both groups (those who felt it was broadly perceived as a stigmatizing marker and those who felt it was broadly perceived as a badge of honor), parental incarceration was characterized as a trait that created social distance between children of incarcerated parents as a group and those around them

Another small group of respondents suggested that the incarceration of their parent was stigma-neutral – that it wasn't something that would really affect perceptions one way or the other. For instance, Abraham didn't think that the incarceration of his father was really noteworthy. When asked if he thought that he talked about his parent's absence differently than he might if his parent was gone for another reason, Abraham said, "[i]t aint nothin' important, like, it's not like, I don't know, it aint got no type of effect. Anybody can know, it doesn't matter. It doesn't mean anything, it's like, okay. There you go." He and three other respondents implied that the loss of a parent to incarceration might not be that different from the loss of a parent for another reason.

Specific ideas about how children of incarcerated parents as a group are perceived by society did not surface in discussions with the remainder of the respondents. While not talking directly about the presence or absence of stereotypes made about children of incarcerated parents in general, some respondents alluded to the possibility of external judgements when discussing the absence of or resistance to external judgements in their own experience. For instance, Marcus asserted that he did not personally experience any shame or judgement:

Marcus: I ain't ashamed to have my dad in jail. It was his choice, not mine. So, if somebody were to try to talk down on me for havin' my dad in jail, I'd say "alright," you know, "you can think that way, you're free to your own opinion. But for you to judge me off of what my father has done, how does that make you look?"

Marcus' discussion of his own resistance to stigma acknowledged that a parent's incarceration could be grounds for shame or external judgement – in saying he wasn't ashamed, he acknowledged that others might be.

In sum, while there were a few respondents who stated that the incarceration of a parent was either stigma-neutral or a mark of status rather than stigma, a majority of respondents

echoed the existing literature in their feeling that children of incarcerated parents, as a group, are viewed differently than their peers. These respondents illustrated the associative nature of stigma when describing how they thought children of incarcerated parents are perceived – noting that a parent’s mark as a criminal could be transferred to their children and result in perceptions that these children were somehow bad, untrustworthy, or destined for failure. This general characterization was relatively uniform, but the way that stigma was experienced on an individual-level was more nuanced and heterogeneous. The remainder of this chapter will explore variation in the personal experience of stigmatization.

### Variations in the experience of stigma: decisions to disclose

For the most part, discussions of the lived experience of stigmatization came through in conversations about disclosure – if, when, and with whom respondents discussed their parent’s incarceration. There was a great deal of variation in level of comfort with disclosure, both between respondents and for the same respondent in different contexts. Choices about disclosure were usually relationship-dependent – respondents often felt comfortable discussing their parent’s incarceration with some people but not others, and the nature of the relationship between children and their parent affected the way they talked about it. Comfort with disclosure was also impacted by involvement with Project WHAT! – participants reported that feelings of shame/embarrassment about their parents’ incarceration and choices to keep this part of their life secret were reduced as they were compelled to speak about it openly as part of the program.

#### *General comfort/discomfort with disclosure*

About two thirds of respondents said that, in general, they avoided sharing information about their parent’s location with others around them. Some even said that they lied or made up

stories about where their parent was rather than disclosing their actual location. For most of these folks, their parent's incarceration was a source of shame - they were compelled to keep details about their parent's whereabouts secret because of their own embarrassment. When asked whether they talked about their parent's incarceration with anyone, respondents answered as follows:

Bianca: I felt like I had to hide it. Like I *had* to hide it. Nobody could know. Like I couldn't tell anyone. I couldn't, you know, I couldn't even tell my best friends in school.

Diana: Uh, I tried to avoid that (laugh)... Um, well, I wasn't, you know, proud of the fact that my dad was in jail. And, uh, I got picked on a lot when I was that young and so, kids would make fun of me sometimes if they knew what was goin' on with my parents.

Richard: ...I didn't think a lot of people accept me because my dad was in prison. So, I never told nobody.

Victor: Mmmm mmm. Like I felt like, that we weren't, like that's like something you're not supposed to, like, talk about. Just 'cause, that's what, like at the time, like that's an embarrassing thing. Like your dad's in jail. So I didn't want anybody to know about that. 'cause I was like embarrassed by it.

Tamira: ...I wanted to tell a lot of people about everything. But I just never did. I kept quiet.

Alex: ...I've been asked, "oh, where's your dad?" And I would know, and didn't want to say, 'cause it's embarrassing. "oh my dad's in jail." Like, who wants to say that to anybody?

These responses suggest a personal internalization of the general stigma of children of incarcerated parents discussed in the previous section. Children chose to keep information about their parent's incarceration secret because they were concerned about this information reflecting badly on themselves. For instance, Bianca said that she didn't ever talk about her mother's incarceration or other details of her home life out of fear that she would be viewed or treated differently than her peers – "...I felt like if they know, like, maybe they're gonna judge me."

Some respondents were explicitly instructed by their caregiver not to disclose information about their incarcerated parent. Carlos explained that when his father went to prison, he and his mother and sister had an understanding that they wouldn't tell anyone about it. He said that he didn't even feel comfortable talking about it when they were in family counselling after his father was released. It seemed that his mother was aware of the stigma attached to parental incarceration, and perpetuated it both by instructing him to keep his father's incarceration secret. Carlos also said that it was pretty common where he grew up to have a parent in prison. There were some kids across the street who had a parent in prison, and his mother made it clear that she didn't want him to "be like that." This instruction further reinforced feelings that parental incarceration was something to be ashamed about. Respondents in the current study describe messages from their caregivers regarding secrecy as follows:

Emily: What were the phone conversations like that you had with her when she was in jail?

Raven: Like "I'm comin' home soon," and "I can't wait to be with y'all" and she was like "whatever you do," like she would say this to my sister, "don't tell nobody where I'm at. Tell them I'm on a vacation." She didn't want nobody to know either.

Carlos: I didn't want to tell anybody, I think that's somethin' that we all talked about. When, before he went. Like, "don't tell anybody, it's between us".

Emily: So you didn't feel comfortable telling anybody about it?

Shawn: Heeeellllll no.

Emily: Can you talk more about that? Why was that?

Shawn: I was, I was embarrassed. Everybody else had their dad- I wasn't gonna tell anybody that my dad was in prison. Plus my mom told me to keep my mouth shut.

If children are told that they are to "keep their mouth shut" about their parent's incarceration they are more likely to expect that this information will reflect badly on them, reinforcing their internalized stigma (see Hagen and Myers 2003).

For those who did not feel comfortable disclosing details of their parent's whereabouts, it was often distressing when these details became public. A few respondents described situations when word about their parent's incarceration got out without their consent. For instance, Jasmine did not necessarily feel comfortable telling people where her dad was, but her peers knew what was going on with her dad because he was arrested very publically at her fifth grade graduation. She said this was a very embarrassing and hurtful moment for her. Similarly, the events leading up to Jeremiah's father's incarceration were also very public, so the whole town knew where his father was even though he would have preferred this information be secret. Naliah said that she told one girl at school about her father's incarceration, and a few days later everyone knew. She said the results of this were a mixed bag – she received some resources and support from grown-ups at the school once they found out, but kids started teasing her about it. This ridicule further reinforced her resolve to keep the information about her father secret.

Six respondents said that they had no qualms about discussing their parent's incarceration if it came up, though for Jada, this was true with regard to her mother but not her father. The quality of Jada's relationships with her mother and her father affected her general comfort with disclosure. Both of Jada's parents had been incarcerated, but she had more shame and embarrassment about her dad's incarceration because she felt closer with him than she did with her mom.

Emily: Okay. Um, so did you feel pretty comfortable if somebody did ask you, like "where's your mom" or "where's your dad?" Did you feel pretty comfortable telling them?

Jada: With my mom, yes, 'cause like I didn't really, I didn't really care for my mom. So it was like, "okay, oh well, yes, she's on drugs," so, yeah. But my father is more like kept secret, 'cause I'm more of a daddy's girl and a grandmother's, like, I'm a grandma's girl and a daddy's girl.

Jada didn't really respect or care for her mom, so she didn't feel bad if people knew that she was using drugs or in jail, whereas she had respect for her dad, so it was a lot harder for her to be honest with herself and others about that side of him.

In sum, most respondents did not generally feel comfortable sharing the details of their parent's incarceration due to embarrassment, shame, or anticipated ridicule. These feelings were reinforced when parents or caregivers told children to keep their parent's incarceration secret. For some, reluctance to talk about their parent's incarceration was legitimated when other children found out and mistreated them as a result. While most respondents were generally reluctant to talk about their parent's incarceration with people outside their family, almost everyone shared this information at some point. The sections to follow will describe contextual factors that impact decisions to disclose.

#### *Relationship type and choice to disclose*

For some respondents, the topic of their parent's incarceration was completely off-limits and never discussed. However, over two thirds of respondents felt like they could talk about their parent's incarceration with some people some of the time. These choices to disclose were highly dependent on the type of relationship with the person they were choosing to tell, and that person's own background. Most frequently, people said they were comfortable discussing their parent's incarceration with a close friend, cousin, or trusted adult. When asked whether they ever talked about their parents with anyone, about half of all respondents said they had discussed it with friends or cousins, and about half said they had discussed it with a teacher or other trusted grown up.

### *Friends*

Respondents described how important it was for them to have someone who would listen, be supportive, and not judge them based on their parent's incarceration. Naliah described the support she got from her three best friends, who were brought closer through conversations they had about the very different struggles each of them had faced. It was particularly meaningful to be able to discuss their parent's incarceration with someone who had shared similar experiences. Bianca, Jada, Jasmine, Naomi, Raven, Shantell, and Trisha all mentioned conversations with friends who had also experienced parental incarceration.<sup>8</sup> These respondents said it felt good to have someone they could go to who had shared similar experiences. For example:

Bianca: ...Me and this girl are still friends today and we, you know, we went through a lot together. And um, our parents were incarcerated at two different times, but, you know. We still talked about it.

Emily: And do you remember what it felt like the first time that you talked to her about it?

Bianca: It felt good, because I felt like, wow, I have a friend who's gone through something. You know, I don't have a friend who just, you know, their life is all jilly jolly. Like, you know, we're, we're goin' through a lot of the same thing, and like, if, maybe if it is two o'clock in the morning and we want to call each other and just be like, "hey, you okay? You good? You know, I'll see you at school tomorrow." It was more of like that type of thing.

While several respondents found relief in talking to close friends about their parent's incarceration, a sizeable minority did not. Jasmine said that she was able to avoid the topic of her father completely by leading everyone to believe that her stepdad was her "real dad." Shantell had talked about it with one very close friend, but parental absence was a topic that she and her friends generally avoided. She said a lot of people she knew didn't have their dad or mom in

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<sup>8</sup> It is noteworthy that these respondents all grew up in or around Oakland, CA and were part of Project WHAT! (though these responses came out in their discussions of life before PW). Respondents interviewed in the Seattle area were much less likely to have had friends with incarcerated parents.

their life, but it wasn't something any of them ever wanted to talk about, so they just didn't go there. David said that he had talked about his dad's incarceration with friends a couple of times, but felt like this changed their opinion of him, so he tried to avoid it: "it gives them a different perspective of you. Like 'oh, his dad is terrible. He might be terrible' you know."

*Teachers or other trusted adults*

More often than not, respondents said that they did not feel comfortable talking about their parent's incarceration with teachers or other adults at school. They often felt like teachers knew about what was going on with their home life, whether or not they told them, but it still wasn't something they wanted to talk about. They kept this information to themselves out of fear of stigmatization. For instance, Bianca "felt like if they knew, like, maybe they're gonna judge me, they're not gonna want me to come into their class no more, and I'm not gonna be able to learn things that I learned. You know what I mean?" Similarly, Naomi said she had a teacher in third grade who "picked on her," and she had the impression that this was because she had taught a lot of her family members and knew about their family history and legal entanglements. Over a third of respondents expressed similar sentiments – that they didn't tell adults at school about their parent's incarceration. A smaller group explicitly said that this was because they didn't want this information to shape teachers' impressions of them.

While many respondents weren't comfortable talking with adults at school about their parent's incarceration, several had positive experiences. Respondents generally felt that caution should be used when deciding whether to disclose this information, but finding a teacher who they could trust was important for many. As with friends, some said that it was easiest talking to adults who had similar life experiences. For example, Jasmine somewhat reluctantly told her sixth grade English teacher that her dad was in jail:

Jasmine: ... I said it like real quiet, and he was like "he's in jail?" and I was like "yeah" he's like "oh I grew up with both of my parents in jail, so I kinda know what you're going through." And I was like, "really?" and he was like "yeah." Like I never, I never knew that about him. And then my 8th grade math teacher, um, he found out through my English teacher ... And he, he uh, he helped. He helped a lot, so.

Emily: How did they help you?

Jasmine: I don't know. They just, I don't know. 'Cause I would, I would keep a whole lot of stuff in, and you could tell on my face that there was something wrong with me. So after school they would be like, "oh is there anything wrong, anything you want to talk about?" And that's when I just poured it out.

Respondents also had positive experiences talking about their parents' incarceration with other trusted adults, such as school staff, coaches, or mentors. Victor was very reluctant to talk about his dad's incarceration with anyone outside the family, but he had a very close relationship with his high school football coach which persisted into college. He felt like he could confide in his coach about his feelings when his dad was incarcerated and after he was released to house arrest. Three respondents said that they were connected with mentors through programs for "at risk" youth. For all of these respondents, the relationship with their mentor was very important for helping them open up and cope with their parent's incarceration:

Emily: How did it feel for you to first open up to her about it?

Naliah: It was, it was, it was relaxing. Because we would always talk about everything, but then when she'll ask about my dad, it was just like "nope, we're not going there. We're not talking about that." And then one day she was like "why don't you like talkin' about your dad? Why don't, 'cause whenever I bring it up, you just change the subject." So um, and I tried to change the subject again, like "I don't want to talk about it, next subject." But she was like "no, like, I don't want to push you, but I just want to know. Like, give me a reason why." And then, um, and we had been goin', she had been my mentor for almost 2 and a half years then. So I was like okay, I feel comfortable tellin' her. Um, but then again I was like, every time I tell someone somethin', they always tell other people. So I was kind of guarded again. But when I did tell her, I was relieved I did. Because, um, she didn't treat me differently. She looked at me like I was stronger. She was like "that didn't make you weak, that made you stronger. You shouldn't be ashamed of it anymore." So yeah, she's awesome.

*Family friends/church community*

Six respondents talked about their level of comfort discussing their parent's incarceration with family friends or their church community. Of these, half felt comfortable disclosing within these relationships and half did not. Matt grew up on an island in a small and relatively affluent community. He said that he didn't feel comfortable talking about his father's incarceration because of the shame associated with it. He said that he wouldn't have had a problem talking about it with someone who was more removed, but he knew that his dad's incarceration could reflect badly on his family, so he tried to avoid talking about it to anyone within his community. He said that the stuff that was going on with his family was a tightly held secret. When asked whether he thought there was a difference between losing a parent due to incarceration or losing a parent due to death, he said that it would be easier to talk about his dad if he had died rather than been incarcerated. Raven and Richard had similar feelings.

Three respondents mentioned support they received from their church community or family friends when their parent was incarcerated. Trisha felt particularly supported by her church community:

Um, they have become like my family basically. Um, and especially 'cause my church is really small. So like, everybody knows my situation. (mhm) and that's like the one place I'm not like ashamed of it, because like, I know that there's another family there that has like a loved one that is incarcerated. So like, they'll talk to me sometimes and be like, "you know, we just went to see them, so how are you?" You know, that kind of thing. Like just check up on you. Um, but also these are people who have known me since I was 14, so they've watched me like evolve, basically. And like my pastor and his wife, those were the people that came to my graduation. Like I spent every birthday with them, from like 18 and up, basically. Um, so they've been like my, my little family.

### *Summary*

In sum, respondents generally felt uncomfortable disclosing information about their parent's incarceration with anyone outside their immediate family. Respondents were most inclined to talk to close friends about their parent's incarceration – more people reported being comfortable talking to friends about their parent's incarceration than not. Respondents also discussed positive outcomes following disclosure to teachers or other trusted adults. However, more respondents felt uncomfortable than comfortable talking to teachers or adults at their school. Disclosure was highly dependent on the level of trust respondents felt towards the grownup, the closeness of their relationship, and how much the grownup could relate to their life experiences.

### *Fear of state intervention*

While not directly related to the stigma of parental incarceration, another important factor that influenced decisions to disclose was the fear of state intervention. Many respondents mentioned that they had contact with CPS at some point in their childhood, and a few indicated that they did not share information about their parent's incarceration or other issues at home because they were afraid that they would be removed from their home. For some, this fear was rooted in actual experiences they had with CPS. For example, Tanya said that she was sometimes too open about her home life when she was young:

You know, um, I got, I did, I just talk, right, I'm friendly, and when I was in elementary, I guess I talked about things that you're not really supposed to tell people, and CPS got involved multiple times, and, um, it was bullshit. They do not help families, they rip them apart. And they do not help children, they just make their lives more fucked up in the end.

Shantell also described an experience where she told a teacher about the circumstances of her father's incarceration (that he was in prison for raping her sister), and it resulted in a CPS visit:

Because it's like, I remember I told my one teacher, like, what he did, and then next thing I know CPS is knockin' at the door. So I was just like, "I told you one thing, and you try to get me taken away from my mom. That's not okay." So I just never told nobody, and then after that my mom would just be like "if anybody asks you somethin', tell them ask your mama." So I started to be like "ask my mama."

State intervention was an unfortunate necessity for some respondents due to the difficult life circumstances they faced. Shantell and her sister Naliah, for example, had a mother who was addicted to drugs and homeless through much of their childhood. Their situation and their relationship with the child welfare system was incredibly complex – while their mother was not always able to take care of them, they did not feel safe in foster care, where Naliah was molested. Secrecy around the details of their home life could have prevented them from finding support and assistance from adults in their life, but they saw disclosure as a path back into the foster care system.

Raven said that she and her sister kept information about their mom's incarceration secret, both because they didn't want people to think that their mom was bad or they were bad by association, and because they were scared that if teachers knew they would call CPS: "I felt like if CPS would've found out, they would separate me my sister my brother, and I didn't want to be nowhere separated from them." However, she said that her principal eventually did find out about her mother's incarceration, CPS did not get involved. Instead, he would come over to the house and help her and her sister out. This didn't prompt Raven to be any more open about her mom's incarceration, but it decreased the fear she had around people finding out.

Rickey expressed similar trepidation about the police knowing information about his father's incarceration. Rickey was very nonchalant about his father's incarceration, and said he felt fine discussing it with pretty much everyone. However, he drew the line when it came to the police: "when I'm in the police department and all that, I don't ever talk about it, ever." Though he didn't mind most people knowing, he was well-aware of the reach of the criminal justice system in his community, and realized there potential consequences of the associative stigma of his father's incarceration.

### *Project WHAT! participation*

Most of the sixteen respondents who had participated in Project WHAT! reported a marked change in comfort around disclosure after they became involved in the program. Youth involved with Project WHAT! are required to write a story about their parent's incarceration. These stories are first shared with each other as part of a week-long summer training program, and then more broadly during presentations about parental incarcerations they give to a variety of audiences. Almost all of the youth involved in the program said that their participation with Project WHAT! made them more comfortable discussing their parent's incarceration in other areas of their life, though some said that it was still a subject they tried to avoid. For example, Miguel:

Before I was in Project WHAT!, I probably would've been shy about telling people in public about my dad being in prison. And after this, like, last year or so, I've like sort of embraced that, my father's incarceration, and it's like motivated me to be able to let people know, like, what's going on. And it's just been, it's easier for me now to talk about it to people, to different people.

Many of these respondents specifically said that they had an easier time talking about their parent's incarceration following their participation with PW because they were no longer embarrassed or ashamed.

Naliah: I'm more open about it. 'Cause I'm like, if I can tell a whole circle of 20+ people, then I can tell it to anyone. Like, and it's still like nervous, like when I was walkin' in here I'm like "Oh my gosh," but it's not as bad. Like, when I get into it, I'll have moments where I'm about to cry, but then I'll be able to recover. Um, so they've helped me, like, tell my story with more confidence. Like at first I'd just be ashamed of it, like, "Oh yeah, my dad beat my mom, and my mom was on drugs." [said in kind of a shy/whiny/meak voice]. And now I'm like "My dad beat my mom. My mom was on drugs. But that, that doesn't define ME." [in a very matter-of-fact tone] So, um, I'm not, I'm not embarrassed anymore. Like at school, people will be like, "oh your dad's incarcerated?" "Yeah, he's incarcerated. Like, he's not with me." And, um, and people appreciate that about me more.

The mission of Project WHAT! is to give voice to children of incarcerated parents and to advocate for policy change that will improve their lives. Reflections from program participants indicate that they are succeeding in the first part of their mission by making a space for youth to speak out about their experiences. In this act of speaking out, PW participants are able to reduce the stigma of incarceration – both internally by reducing their own shame/embarrassment and externally by raising awareness.

### *Summary of variation in decisions to disclose*

Interviews and focus groups with youth and young adults reveal that, in general, information about a parent's incarceration is a tightly held secret. Children are not comfortable discussing the whereabouts of their incarcerated parent, particularly when there is risk of child protective services becoming involved or when their caregiver has explicitly told them to keep the information secret. However, there was variation both between respondents in the level of general comfort they had with disclosing information about their parent's incarceration, and for the same respondent across different contexts. Some respondents had no qualms about discussing their parent's incarceration, and would freely share the information if it came up (though, as Julie pointed out, it rarely did: "I don't mind talking about it, but it doesn't come up in

conversation.”). Others never shared the information, even with their closest friends or romantic partners (Shawn, for example: “I didn’t tell anybody. As a matter of fact, I still don’t tell nobody. I haven’t even told my girlfriend that my dad was in prison.”).

Most respondents were somewhere in the middle – they generally felt like parental incarceration wasn’t something to discuss openly, but they could share this information in certain contexts. Most frequently, respondents felt comfortable discussing their parent’s incarceration with their closest friends. However, they did not generally feel like it was something they wanted to share in their extended friend network, or with other kids at school. For many, this was because they expected that they would be unfairly judged or ridiculed – often this was purely conjecture, but some had actually been teased by their peers because of their parent’s incarceration. Respondents did not generally feel comfortable sharing information about their parent’s whereabouts with teachers or other adults at their school, either out of fear of judgement or reporting to CPS. However, when they did talk to a trusted grownup, most found that it helped provide them with extra support or belonging (though some felt they were unfairly judged, and one said that this resulted in a CPS call).

For Project WHAT! participants, being compelled to share the details of their parent’s incarceration with peers and public audiences made them realize that disclosing wasn’t always met with judgement or ridicule. As a result, they became more comfortable sharing their story in other contexts. In this way, the internalized stigma of parental incarceration was reduced through participation with PW. In addition to serving as a support group and a place to get things off their chests, PW participants felt that their public presentations helped others to better understand what it means to be children of incarcerated parents, and in doing so, combat the external/societal stigma. While the reaction of peers and adults occasionally resulted in

undesirable outcomes, increased openness about their parent's incarceration was generally viewed as a change for the better.

## Variations in the experience of stigma: intersectional stigmas and cumulative disadvantage

For several respondents, the stigma of parental incarceration intersected with or was overshadowed by other stigmatized statuses, such as blackness, disability, poverty, substance abuse, homelessness, foster care, or their own criminal justice contact. The incarceration of their parent was a very meaningful life event for many respondents, but being a child of an incarcerated parent wasn't anybody's master status.<sup>9</sup> In the sections that follow, I will describe how respondents discussed the intersection of parental incarceration with other potentially stigmatizing characteristics. These reflections highlight the importance of accounting for the accumulation of disadvantage—the process whereby different sources of disadvantage co-exist and interact to produce exponentially worse outcomes for marginalized populations (Harris, Evans, and Beckett 2010; Laub and Sampson 1993). The experience of parental incarceration overlaps with and reinforces other systems of inequality.

### *Race*

Prior research on the effect of parental incarceration on child outcomes has produced counterintuitive results regarding the role of race. Racial disparities in criminal justice are

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<sup>9</sup> The term “master status” is used in sociology to describe a trait that “tends to overpower, in most crucial situations, any other characteristics which might run counter to it” (Hughes 1945:357). Hughes (1945) described the process whereby ascribed characteristics are imbued with status, and when the roles attached to different characteristics are conflicting, status associated with certain characteristics (particularly race and gender) tend to dominate. Later work by (Becker 1963) and Goffman (1963) shows that characteristics central to outward appraisals of an individual play a large role in shaping self-identity, and that the “master status” assigned by others can often come to dominate one's self-identity.

pervasive and well-established, but research on the consequences of parental incarceration for children does not show that the effect of parental incarceration is worse for black children than their white peers (Foster and Hagan 2009; Wildeman 2010). Haskins (2014) finds that the negative effect of parental incarceration on school readiness is actually worse for white boys than it is for black boys. These findings call for a more nuanced examination of the role race plays in the experience of parental incarceration (see also Haskins and Lee 2016). Respondents interviewed for the current study add some depth to the understanding of racial variations in the stigma of parental incarceration.

Brandon, a white male who was finishing up his bachelor's degree at the time of the interview, had interesting insights regarding variation in stigmatization by race that were validated by other respondents. Brandon felt that the stigma of parental incarceration was likely more relevant for black kids because of compounding associations of blackness with criminality:

People like to confirm their stereotypes, and if I was a young black kid and my dad was in prison, they might just immediately assume that I was a trouble-maker. Even if they don't know me. But uh, it's not, it's not so much of a stereotype to be a white kid who's a trouble-maker if your dad's in prison. I guess they can, they ignore the stereotype for me whereas they're confirming it for the other group.

Likewise, Jasmine was a black high school student who said that she didn't want anyone at her predominately white school to know about her dad's incarceration because they would already have preconceived notions about her based on the fact that she was black. She implied that, because of the implicit link between blackness and criminality and the further stigma resulting from her dad's incarceration, she thought it was better to keep this detail secret.

Jasmine: ...but, I don't know, I still didn't share with many people. 'cause I went to really, um, white school. So they will, I knew from the start that they would

look at me differently. So I just thought I would just keep it to myself. That's what I pretty much did.

Emily: When you say you said that you thought that they would look at you differently, how did you think that they would look at you?

Jasmine: They would just be like, I don't know, "don't trust her in the classroom by herself, she's gonna take something." And just, just a whole bunch of other stuff like that.

Brandon and Jasmine thus expected that the associative stigma of parental incarceration was more likely to be activated for black children than white children. Regardless of how this plays out in the actual treatment of individual children of incarcerated parents or the consequences they face, it contributes to the silencing of this population and perpetuates of feelings of stigmatization. These racialized dynamics are reflected in feelings of stigmatization expressed by other respondents as well. In analyzing interview and focus group data, I coded respondents as having felt stigmatized if they expressed that they, at any point, felt uncomfortable disclosing information about their parent's, or if they had felt that they were treated differently than other children because their parent was incarcerated. As shown in Table 3, these themes were less likely to come up in conversations with white respondents, and when they did, white respondents were less likely to report that they had felt stigmatized.

*Table 3: Race and feelings of stigmatization*

<b>Felt Stigmatized</b>	<b>Non-White</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Total</b>
Didn't discuss	1(5%)	3(21%)	4(11%)
No	3(14%)	6(43%)	9(25%)
Yes	18(82%)	5(36%)	23(64%)
Total	22	14	36

Discussions about general comfort with disclosure also revealed the racialized nature of stigma and secrecy. Rita and Shawn said that they didn't talk about their father's incarceration because the topic was "taboo." These respondents both grew up in poor, black communities

where incarceration was a relatively common life event. Though incarceration was common, there was an understanding that it wasn't to be discussed. Tamira, also from a poor black community, describes this social silence as follows:

Emily: Do you know, when you were little if you had any friends that had parents that had been incarcerated?

Tamira: I could assume yes, because of where I grew up. We didn't speak about it.

Emily: But nobody talked about it

Tamira: 'Cause that's how it was. That whole community, just, yeah, that's how it was in the ghetto. And it probably still is like that.

Emily: What do you think it is that prevents people from talking about it?

Tamira: In the interest of wanting people to feel like you have it all, your family's okay, and nothing's wrong.

Similarly, Keisha said that she knew there were other kids in her school with a parent incarcerated, but “we just never really talked about it 'cause it was somethin' we didn't really want to talk about.” When asked how she knew that other kids had incarcerated parents if it wasn't something they talked about, she discussed unspoken assumptions that people in her community make when a parent is absent. She said that, in her school, when teachers talked about calling a grownup other than a parent, it was assumed that the parent was gone because they were incarcerated (or somewhere else up to no good):

...so maybe at like um back to school nights or somethin', it would always be like their grandma, or their aunt, or somethin', or their uncle just there. And it's like, “where's your parents bra” or like, “where's your mom, why is your mom never here? Why do they never call your mom when you get in trouble?” You know, you know how sometimes in the class they say, “I'm gonna call your grandma.” You know, it's like, “I'm gonna call your mom, Keisha.” It—yeah, I mean it's like “Oh I'm gonna call your mom.” They'd always be like, “oh, I'm gonna call your uncle. You don't want me to call your brother.” You know, it was just, you could tell by how the teacher makes it and how the student reacts sometimes. And how some friends that even—when I'm older now, people still don't want to talk about it.

The silence around parental incarceration described by these respondents is also reflected in Braman's (2004) ethnographic account of families with incarcerated relatives in the District of Columbia. Braman found that people in communities where incarceration is the statistical norm rarely talk about their relative's incarceration with anyone outside their immediate family. He further argues that the threat of stigmatization has a silencing and isolating effect on families, preventing them from seeking social support from others in the community, despite the fact that most other families have also experienced the incarceration of a loved one. This isolating effect compounds the deleterious effects of the association between blackness and criminality – "Not only does being black mean that a person stands a greater chance of being detained, arrested, convicted, and the recipient of a longer sentence, as studies have demonstrated, but when being black is combined with criminality, it means losing a fair measure of whatever social solidarity and support one's community might provide" (Braman 2004:186).

While the stigma of parental incarceration was clearly a concern for many people of color interviewed for this study, it is important to point out that this was not the case for all respondents. In a focus group, Project WHAT! participants were asked how they thought race affected the experience of parental incarceration. Abraham (a black teenager) responded that he thought neighborhood had more to do with the way people cope with parental incarceration than race, and implied that the stigma of parental incarceration was not as salient for children in communities where it is commonplace:

Um, to me, I think that doesn't change it at all. I just think it depends on if you grew up in the hood or not. 'Cause if you grew up, like, in the hood, that's- like, that happens all the time. Like everybody parent in jail, or somethin' goin' on, so it's like alright, you're used to it. But if you don't, like if you grow up somewhere where, like, everybody's parents are around, and then your parent goes to jail, you feel left out and confused, and you don't understand what's goin' on. You know.

Abraham's reflections prompted interesting responses from Jada and Trisha, who described their perceptions of the interaction between race-based stigma and the stigma of parental incarceration:

Jada: I agree with what was just stated, also, because, like, it do depend on your neighborhood. And it's like a stereotype for people of color, mainly African American and Latinos, to go to jail. So it's like, okay, for you to be stereotyped as, okay, you gonna be a young black man goin' to jail, and they're already buildin' cells for you startin' at kindergarten, so it's like, they already have it set up for you. So it's like, race does play a major, it's a major impact on incarceration for people of color, just how they ways the system is just set up. So for, especially for people of color that fail, and easily just fall into that system.

Trisha: Um, I agree mainly with the first statement. Um, because, like, I grew up, like, basically in the hood, whatever it is you want to call it. Um, but even with that, it wasn't like, I guess when I was growing up, it wasn't something we talked about. It wasn't something that, like, when people said their parents weren't around, you didn't ask questions. At least not, like, where I grew up at. Like, it wasn't like, "Oh where are-", it was like, "Oh, okay, they not around." But I think for me being white, and being the fact that both of my parents have been incarcerated, when I tell people that, they act like they're so shocked. And then it's like, and then people, and that's when people start to treat me differently, when they find out that both my parents are white and that they were both incarcerated, 'cause then it's like, it makes people believe like "oh you're trailer trash" type of thing. Because that's the main label that gets put on us. But like, and I do feel like race plays into it, because, yes there are those stereotypes, like what she was just saying, but then there's also the way that like, people don't expect, I guess, white people to mess up, or whatever it is. But then it's like, when they do, it's like the biggest deal in the world. And it's like, "oh, they're such horrible people." And like, 'cause that's how people look at, like, like I've heard so many people say that, and they'll be like talking about me, or like my mom, or whatever, it's just like, it feels like, it's a big, like, people blow it out of proportion sometimes.

Trisha's reflections echo Arditti's argument that the stigma of parental incarceration could be more acute for white children because parental incarceration isn't "the norm" as it is in many communities of color (Arditti 2015). As Abraham and Jada point out, the stigma of blackness is already so intertwined with the stigma of incarceration that having a parent incarcerated doesn't add much more to existing perceptions that black kids are destined to end up incarcerated.

It is important to note that participation in Project WHAT! may influence race differences in feelings of stigmatization observed in this analysis. Most of the non-white respondents interviewed for this research were involved in Project WHAT!, an organization whose primary focus is to have frank and open discussions about the challenges faced by children of incarcerated parents. It is likely that engaging in regular conversations with other children of incarcerated parents could result in a convergence of interpretations/narratives regarding their own personal experiences. The right “not to be judged, blamed, or labeled because my parent is incarcerated” is included in the Children of Incarcerated Parents Bill of Rights that acts as the cornerstone for much of Project WHAT!’s programming (see [Appendix A](#)). Because this is a topic that PW participants have all thought about given the nature of the program, they are more likely to use this as a frame for discussing their own experiences with parental incarceration. The racialized patterns observed here are interesting and reveal qualitative differences that complicate quantitative findings regarding the role of race in shaping outcomes of children of incarcerated parents, but suggest a need for more research to unpack the complex relationship between race and parental incarceration.

### *Poverty and homelessness*

For some respondents, the stigma of being poor was more central to their experience than the stigma of parental incarceration. Danny said that he felt like a social outcast in school, but this was mostly because of his home situation and the lack of consistent parenting on the part of his mother. He said he felt picked on because he went to school "lookin' like a damn scrub." Both Danny and Alyssa didn't find out about their fathers' incarceration until they were teenagers. Like Danny, Alyssa said that she was already socially outcast by the time she found out about

her father's incarceration. When asked what school was like for her when she was young, Alyssa responded "Um, I was pretty much a loner. Not a lot of money." Seth was aware of his father's incarceration, but said that he never felt that he felt judged or treated differently as a result. However, near the end of our conversation, he did say "I guess some of my friends' parents, if they told their parents, that wouldn't really look good. So I guess they probably thought we were white trash or somethin' like that. You know." This statement suggests that, in Seth's mind, the way his father's incarceration reflected on the family was very much intertwined with class. Interestingly, these three white respondents all felt the stigma of poverty more than the associative stigma of criminality that was frequently discussed by black respondents.

Jeremiah felt that the whole package of his family background contributed to ridicule he faced at school – race, class, and his father's behavior. Jeremiah's father killed his grandfather in the summer between his second and third grade. He lived in a small town, and when he returned to school that fall, all of the kids knew what had happened and talked about it. He said he didn't stop hearing about it until he grew up and moved away. In addition to asking questions about the details of his father's incarceration, Jeremiah said that kids would also make mean comments about his family and his house.

Jeremiah: When I came to school, people were looking at me different. You know, the whole class is like lookin' at me. So, imagine, you know, you're in school and all your friends know what happened and, um, I didn't like the spotlight on me. I didn't like being, I felt like an oddball. So, and kids would be uh, those other kids I used to go to school, other minority kids, 'cause they knew our family, they would be really like, uh, not respectful of it and like ask me questions about it in front of people. And you know, I didn't like talkin' about it.

Emily: So when they were asking you about it, what kind of questions would they ask you?

Jeremiah: They'd just say it straight up, "hey, oh yeah, hey, I heard about what happened. Man, you're dad killed your grandfather man?" And they would just, you'd sit at the table and eat lunch, and they'd just bring it up ... I think because they knew that our living situation was hard, my mom was the only one working,

we lived in kind of a rundown house, so they would talk about that. They would tell my business and talk about “God, your house is messed up,” and “I heard you guys got roaches,” and they would just say everything, all my business, they would just, anything they knew about my family, any kid that knew my family, ‘cause there were other like black kids that were friends of mine, their parents had went to high school with my dad, ‘cause they’re all from the same town. So their kids would hear it from their parents any of our business, and they would say it to me in school and front me, put me on front street, you know.

Naliah and Shantell’s<sup>10</sup> mom got very depressed and became a heavy drug user following their father’s incarceration. As a result, they spent a lot of their childhood in shelters or on the street. Their mom would get them ready for school in the MacDonald’s bathroom and make sure they looked put together. Hiding this part of their life from teachers and kids at school was more central to their day-to-day experience than the incarceration of their father. While they both expressed feelings of shame and embarrassment related to their father’s incarceration and the events leading up to it, this detail of their lives was very much intertwined with the general chaos of their childhoods.

### *Lack of family/foster care*

About one third of the respondents had spent time in foster care at some point during their childhood. For those who had been in foster care, it was a very dominant feature of their childhood experience. While some had positive experiences in foster care or expressed that they were better off in foster care than they would have been with their parents, several said that they were mistreated in foster care. Even when respondents had a positive experience in foster care, they frequently felt like this was another source of stigma. For instance, Trisha was very guarded when it came to discussing details of her home life in general, but was more embarrassed by the

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<sup>10</sup> Naliah and Shantell are sisters who were both part of Project WHAT!

fact that she didn't have any family who would take care of her following her mom's incarceration than she was about her mom's incarceration itself:

...it's embarrassing. Like, I don't know, I think, it's not embarrassing that she's in jail, but it's embarrassing that I didn't have anybody else. Like, at least when other people's parents like went to jail, they had their grandma, or they had like another family member, or something. Like, I didn't have anybody else that like, was like "oh, I'll take care of you because you're my family."

Tamira also felt that living in foster care was much more of a source of stigma than her dad's incarceration - it was the thing that most shaped her experience as a child/teenager. She said that she was picked on by other kids because she was in foster care, and that it made her life very difficult. She felt that people didn't necessarily know that her father was in prison, but they all knew that she was in foster care because social workers would come to school. She didn't like that people knew, because "I thought it was normal that everybody's stayin' with their parents, so I thought that people would think I wasn't normal."

Tamira: And I remember, I even remember my friends making a joke about it when I was in middle school... They were like, um, "so you're a warden of the courts." Like somethin' with taxes, and somethin' like "we paid for you." Somethin' like that, and it just rubbed me the wrong - I just did not like that whole thing. That's when I hated bein' in foster care. I HATED it. I don't remember the exact joke, that they were joking, but to me it's just not a joke, I mean.

Emily: Like that's my life?

Tamira: Yeah.

Stephanie said that she was made fun of by the biological children of the foster parents she was placed with as a result of her dad's incarceration and mom's drug use: "Um, well I went into foster care - I went into one, they were a primarily black family. Mom didn't like that, dad didn't really have any choice in it, I didn't like being there, the kids were mean. The kids made fun of me because I was in foster care. I was- the kids were mean." Stephanie said that the

“mean” kids in her foster home were more hung up on the fact that her parents couldn’t take care of her, not her father’s incarceration specifically.

### *Teen pregnancy*

Tamira had a baby at age 16, and Bianca was 16 years old and 8.5 months pregnant at the time of the interview. These respondents both discussed the judgements they experienced as a result of their teen pregnancies. Tamira said that she got picked on when she was pregnant by both family members and random strangers:

...everyone just looked down on me, callin’ me a slut, all kinds of stuff...Like strangers would come up to me and be like “how old are you?” And then I would be like “16” They would be like “why are you, you know,” ‘cause I had a big stomach. Uh, bus drivers would say stuff to me. Uh, family members said stuff. My auntie, that’s why we didn’t have a relationship at that time. ‘Cause she told me that I was dumb, and she called me a bitch, and stupid, and my brother told me I was the dumbest female he’d met.

Bianca didn’t go into as much detail regarding the stigma she felt as a teen mom, but did allude to external judgements she faced. Bianca’s parents were also very young when she was born, and felt that this added another layer to the associative stigma she faced as a result of her mother’s incarceration:

...at first, I was like “I can’t do this. I don’t want to be like my mom. I don’t want to be like my dad.” But then, I was like “I can do this. And I’m not gonna be like them. And I’m going to prove to everybody who has an opinion about me being pregnant that I can do it.” So that’s how I thought about it.

### *Impairment*

A few respondents interviewed for this study described cognitive delays, mental health conditions, or behavior problems that created additional social distance between them and their peers. For example, Alex was born premature, and dealt with some developmental delays as a result of this. He describes feeling "not normal" as a result of the medical issues associated with

his low birth weight. For Alex, this stigma superseded the stigma of parental incarceration. He describes being very shy and reserved as a child, but more as a result of his developmental delays than his dad's incarceration. While the issues related to his low birth weight seemed to have more of an impact on him than his dad's incarceration socially, he did express that he felt embarrassed about his dad's incarceration. He said that he felt embarrassed about his dad's incarceration, and avoided telling people about where his dad was because he thought they might see him differently - "Maybe that I'll go on to the same path he went on, you know. "

Richard said that he was in special education throughout school and dropped out in 9<sup>th</sup> grade – he said that he was picked on and beat up by other kids because he was an “oddball.” Tamira also felt stigmatized because she had an individualized education plan (IEP). She said her IEP made her feel “unnatural” – she hated it when the special ed teacher would pull her out of class for specialized instruction, because all the other kids knew where she was going. She realized that she wasn't performing well academically, but “I didn't feel like I needed to be in special ed. I just felt like if the teachers sat with me a little bit longer or explained things a little bit more, then I would be fine. That's what I needed and was missing in school.”

### *Own behavior/criminal justice contact*

In the process of conducting research for this project, I had several informal conversations with teachers. These conversations suggested that adults at school rarely know what's happening with kids at home unless they have behavior issues – it is in the context of discussions about behavior that information about a parent's incarceration is typically revealed. This impression was also revealed in interviews. Knowledge about a parent's incarceration, and the associated stigma, became more salient in situations where they were displaying problem

behavior. According to Barden et al. (2004) context is important for the automatic activation of attitudes – stereotypes held by a group don't necessarily surface in contexts where those stereotypes are not relevant.

Julie, a white female who was in graduate school at the time of the interview, described her perception of the stigma of parental incarceration as context-specific – she didn't anticipate being devalued as a result of her dad's incarceration because she didn't ever find herself in situation where she felt that this status would be salient: “No, I was a good student, I wasn't a trouble, so we had no special talks.” A small handful of respondents did not feel that the stigma of parental incarceration applied to them for similar reasons. Brandon, for example, never felt like his father's incarceration reflected badly on him:

No. Uh, I've noticed that in, I guess TV and movies where people are like “woah, her parent was in prison,” or somethin' and then they think differently of her, but I've never experienced that. Like, at least I never thought people were thinking it even if they were, so I was never worried about it, I never felt like I was being put down because my dad was in prison... I'm not my dad. And I knew that I was completely different from him in my actions, and so I didn't think his actions reflected on me at all.”

While Jasmine did fear that knowledge about her father's incarceration could interact with her blackness to activate external judgements from teachers and peers (as discussed above), she felt she was buffered from these associations because she didn't find herself in situations where this information could become relevant: “I did pretty good, so teachers didn't really ask me what was happening at home, 'cause my grades were very good.” This allowed her to avoid disclosing information about her father's location, and face the associated stigma.

Conversely, several respondents reported that they were more acutely aware of their stigmatized status in situations where they were they were behaving in ways that were

stereotype-congruent. For example, Shawn indicated that he felt the stigma of his father's incarceration more acutely because he had been incarcerated himself:

Emily: Why don't you tell people? How do you think that they'd react?

Shawn: Because I feel like it'd uh, it'd rub off on my character. Or I'll lose face, or somethin' like that.

Emily: Ok, so you think that his actions will be reflected on you?

Shawn: Yeah. Especially because I ended up goin' to prison myself.

For some respondents, the awareness of stigmatization was triggered by explicit messages they received from adults around them drawing similarities between them and their parent. For example, Jada's arguments with the aunt and cousin she lived with would often circle back to her mother – “lately I've been noticing, people have been telling me the way that I act and do certain things is like, we may be stuck in a situation like how your mother was. Where you just go crazy and do something you know you can't get yourself out of.” Nick also said that his dad was mentioned when he and his brother were getting into trouble – “Um, but sometimes when me or my brother do things like try to sell drugs or use hard drugs or, you know, have anger problems, sometimes my mom or my aunt or my grandma, whoever is involved, will, you know, ask us if we want to end up like our dad.”

### *Summary of variations in intersectional stigmas*

The accounts of these respondents reveal the difficulty of trying to isolate the effects of parental incarceration when examining stigma. For some respondents, parental incarceration is only one of several socially devalued traits that interact to shape their position within social power structures. It is important to acknowledge that each of these stigmatized identities do not

exist in a silo<sup>11</sup> – all of them interact, with some being more central to individuals' experiences/identity than others. As articulated by Jasmine, the experience of being black in a predominately white school interacted with the fact that her father was incarcerated to form her evaluation of how others would perceive her. Tamira's experience as the child of an incarcerated parent was overshadowed by the marginalization she experienced as a black teen mother in foster care with an IEP. Understanding the complexities of these intersecting identities is key to understanding the stigma of parental incarceration and its role in the accumulation of disadvantage.

### Variations in the experience of stigma: type of perceived bias

Among those who did feel stigmatized, the stigma manifested itself in a variety of ways. When discussing how they felt they were viewed differently than their peers, respondents expressed that they sometimes felt as though they were marked as a delinquent and sometimes felt that they were pitied because of their parent's incarceration. In many cases, pity was accompanied by lowered expectations or extra attention.

#### *"The apple doesn't fall far from the tree"*

Jasmine reported that people in her neighborhood made assumptions about her and her older brother based on their father's reputation:

Um, me and my brother, this was when we were like, this is not too long ago actually, like 2 years ago? We were walking somewhere, and, 'cause my brother looks a lot like my dad. And so do I, in a way. And they were like, "what's your

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<sup>11</sup> Crenshaw's (1991) theory of intersectionality illustrates the multiplicative effects of possessing multiple marginalized identities – particularly being black and female. From this perspective, focusing only on race-based or gender-based oppression within a society that is both dominated by white supremacy and patriarchy further marginalizes individuals that fall outside both dominant categories.

last name?” No, they asked us what our name was, and we was like “J and C,” and then they, um, he’s like “who’s y’all’s dad” and we just looked at each other and walked away, because we already knew where this was going. And then he was like “y’all know big N?” And we was like, “yep, that’s our dad.” And he was like, “Oh, I need y’all to hold this for us.” And we was like “NO.” (laugh) “We’re not gonna do it.” It was like drugs, and we were like 12 and 13. I was like, no, it’s not gonna happen, we’re not gonna do it. And they were just like “oh, y’all a’int no M (last name)s then.” We was like, okay. Everybody thought that we were gonna do somethin’ because my dad would do it. And that’s not us.

David also felt that knowledge about his father’s whereabouts changed people’s perceptions of him: “Like even your best friends, it gives them a different perspective on you. Like ‘oh, his dad is terrible. He might be terrible’ you know.” Diana said that kids in her class at school would make fun of her by saying things like “oh, so when are you goin’ to jail?”

Several respondents reported that family members or caregivers made connections between their parent’s incarceration and the ways they behave. For example, Jada’s aunt and cousin that she was living with at the time of the interview frequently told her that, with the way she acts, “we may be stuck in a situation like how your mother was.” Naomi also said that her cousins would say things like, “your dad’s a drug addict, dude. You’re not going to get anywhere ‘cause your dad’s a drug addict.” Danny said that his mother would bring up his father when scolding him: “I mean, literally, that’s what she would say. I mean, just ‘you’re a piece of shit, you’re good for nothing, you’re gonna end up like your dad in prison.’ You know, just, all sorts of hateful things.” Nick’s mother also drew parallels between he and his father “...my mom tells me every day how much me and my brother are like my dad and his brother.”

### *Pity*

Respondents also reported that their parent’s incarceration elicited pity from others around them. For example, after Jasmine’s father’s very public arrest at her 5<sup>th</sup> grade graduation, people looked at her differently when she entered middle school. When asked to explain she

respond, “I don’t know, they just looked like, they looked at me as if they felt bad for me. And I don’t, I don’t want people to feel bad for me.” Naliah said that teacher’s treated her differently than other students if they knew what was going on at home. She said that some teachers had negative expectations about her behavior based on her father’s incarceration, and others felt pity. Naomi felt the same way – “it can go two ways. They can feel sorry for you, or they can be like ‘oh, you’re a convict’s daughter.’”

### *Lowered Expectations*

Pity was often accompanied by lowered expectations, particularly in a school setting. For example, Naliah said that teachers sometimes took it a little too easy on her because of what was going on with her at home:

...my other teachers would be like, “ooh, we’re doing this, we’re doing these projects but you don’t have to do them because I know what’s going on at home, and it must be hard for you.” And those teachers, I mean I understood they’re helping me, and sometimes I needed the break, but also I needed the distraction. So it kind of made me mad, like, don’t feel sorry for me. I’m no less than the other students, I can still do it.

Similarly, Jada felt that teachers who knew about her home situation felt pity for her. She said that they appreciated sometimes that they took it easy on her, but also felt sometimes like she was being babied. She wished sometimes that she was held more to the same standards as other kids in her class, and that it would be better for her to learn to live with the cards she had been dealt.

I felt like people felt more sorry for me. Which at times I did feel comfortable because what I was goin’ through and what I had to go through at home and things, it’s like ‘okay, they’re givin’ me less stress to worry about.’ But at the same time I felt like, ‘you don’t have to baby me. I’m still human, I still have to live and do things on my own.’

*Extra attention*

Pity was also frequently accompanied by extra attention from adults. When asked whether they were ever treated differently as a result of their parents' incarceration, about one fourth of respondents mentioned receiving extra attention or assistance from those around them. Respondents described teachers that pulled them aside to give them extra help, extended family that stepped in to try and fill the role of the incarcerated parent, and neighbors that helped the family by bringing food and providing childcare.

Nick: I remember being younger and teachers like talking to me after school for a long time and giving me candy and stuff like that. And, you know, help me.

Seth: Uh, my uncle [name] was really there for me when my dad wasn't around. Um, I don't really remember talkin' about, talkin' about it. But he definitely went out of his way to be a father figure.

Stephanie: I think maybe they looked at me like I needed more attention, sometimes. And maybe I did, maybe I didn't. Um, I always felt like people would try to pay attention to me more.

While this extra help was typically well-received and welcome support, sometimes felt that they didn't need or want the extra attention. For example, Shantell felt that teachers kept a closer eye on her than they did other students, and often provided her with extra help and encouragement. When asked what it felt like when she was treated that way, she responded, "It was frustratin', but then at the same time, I was like 'they care. Like, for once, somebody care.' So it made me happy, but then I was just like 'you always in my face. Like, back up.' Yeah." Shantell realized that the extra attention she received was from a place of caring, but she didn't necessarily want the extra attention.

*Summary in variations of perceived bias*

In their descriptions of generalized perceptions regarding children of incarcerated parents, respondents most frequently described the associative stigma of parental incarceration –

notions that “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” Respondents generally believed that, as a group, children of incarcerated parents were viewed as more prone to criminal behavior than their peers. However, in discussing specific instances in which they felt they were treated differently because of their parent’s incarceration, the nature of stigma was more varied. In addition to feeling like others viewed them as “bad” because their parent was in prison, respondents felt like their parent’s incarceration frequently resulted in feelings of pity. These perceptions of pity were often accompanied by lowered expectations and/or extra attention from adults. While the pity or extra attention resulting from their parent’s incarceration was not necessarily a bad thing, and often resulted in helping them receive necessary social/academic/emotional support, it did maintain a sense of difference or “otherness” from their peers.

### **Discussion: stigmatization is ubiquitous but not uniform**

In general, respondents saw parental incarceration as a source of stigma and were wary of sharing details about their parent’s incarceration with people outside their immediate families. However, feelings of stigmatization varied across individuals and situations. This variation came through in discussions of decisions to disclose, intersection with other stigmatizing characteristics, and the nature of perceived bias based on parental incarceration.

Some respondents never talked about their parent’s incarceration with anyone, but most felt comfortable discussing their parent’s incarceration with close friends or trusted adults. Though most felt general discomfort with disclosure, talking with someone close to them provided a much-needed sense of support and belonging for many respondents. For Project WHAT! participants, sharing their experiences with a broad range of audiences made them more

comfortable sharing their story in other contexts. In this way, the internalized stigma of parental incarceration was reduced through participation with PW.

In-depth conversations about childhood histories revealed that parental incarceration was an important event that helped to shape personal identity, but among those who felt marginalized for any reason, parental incarceration it was not generally their most central/salient stigmatizing characteristic. Parental incarceration operated alongside race, poverty, impairment, teen parenthood, and own transgressions to shape the social experience of respondents. Respondents' discussions of these intersecting sources of marginalization align with a large body of literature establishing the criminal justice system's role in perpetuating the accumulation of disadvantage and reproducing inequality (Comfort 2007; Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999; Harris et al. 2010; Manza and Uggen 2014; Massoglia 2008; Mauer and Chesney-Lind 2002; Pager 2003, 2007; Pettit and Western 2004; Wacquant 2009; Western 2002; Western and Pettit 2010).

There was also variation in the nature of stigmatization experienced by respondents. While some felt as though they were viewed as more prone to delinquency because they had a parent who was "marked" as a criminal, others felt pitied as a result of their parent's incarceration. For some this pity translated to perceptions of lowered expectations. There is evidence that these perceptions have teeth in research showing that teachers view children of incarcerated parents as less competent than their peers (Dallaire et al. 2010; Turney and Haskins 2014).

In sum, these findings reveal that most children of incarcerated parents experience stigmatization in one form or another, but there is a great deal of variation in the degree and nature of this stigmatization. Much of the research on parental incarceration alludes to the

associative stigma of parental incarceration – drawing links between a parent’s criminal record and expectations of a child’s behavior. While this association was a common theme discussed by respondents, they did not always feel that the stigma applied to them or that they were treated differently as a result of these generalized notions. Many also shared perceptions that their parent’s incarceration resulted in pity or lowered expectations rather than (or in addition to) behavioral expectations. In the following chapter I will further examine variation in the stigma of parental incarceration by describing common responses to parental incarceration.

## Chapter 5: Variations in the Response to Parental Incarceration

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Chapter 4 examined ways that children of incarcerated parents experience stigmatization, and how this varies between individuals and social contexts. As this chapter will describe, there was also a great deal of variation in the psychological and behavioral response to parental incarceration. Social psychological research shows that internalization of stigma can lead to lowered self-esteem, psychological distress, social withdrawal, and stereotype-congruent behavior (Jussim et al. 2003; Steele and Aronson 1995; Swim and Stangor 1998). However, these effects vary between stigmatized individuals and for the same individual across contexts (Crocker 1999; Crocker and Quinn 2000; Inzlicht and Good 2006; Major and Schmader 1998; Miller 2006). These variations are evident in the reflections of interview and focus group participants.

For some, the embarrassment and secrecy around their parent's incarceration led to social withdrawal or isolation. Several respondents (or their siblings) also acted, at times, in ways that were stereotype-congruent, in some cases resulting in their own contact with the criminal justice system. There was also a group of respondents who actively resisted the stereotypes associated with parental incarceration and acted in ways that would take them down a different path than their parents. These responses were not mutually exclusive – most coped with the incarceration of their parent and the associated stigma in different ways at different times in their lives. Moreover, responses to the *stigma* of parental incarceration should be analyzed in conjunction with the response to parental incarceration more generally. This chapter will describe the most common responses to parental incarceration and identify factors that could mediate the social-psychological effects of parental incarceration.

## Relief

While most participants in this study framed the incarceration of their parent as a negative life event, it is important to note that it was rarely a discrete incident. It was frequently the events surrounding a parent's incarceration, and not the incarceration itself, that caused the most distress for children. For a large number of respondents, a parent's incarceration was part of larger picture that included other stressors such as drug and alcohol addiction, domestic violence, housing instability, and alienation from extended family. While incarceration was a distressing and stigmatizing event, it also provided some respite for children living in generally chaotic households.

Matt reported that when his dad went to prison, it was like there was "a huge weight bein' lifted." He said that his father had been arrested multiple times for domestic violence, and when they found out that his dad would be incarcerated he could sense his mom's relief, and there was calmness in the household that was not there before: "You know, just because, obviously it was a domestic violence situation. He was gonna be gone, and you know, she didn't- he was gonna be long for a long time so it wasn't gonna be like any of the previous times when she knew he would be coming back shortly." These sentiments were echoed by several other respondents, including Keisha:

Emily: What sort of a response did you have when the cops showed up?

Keisha: I was always scared a lot. I never really liked cops, that's just because of the neighborhood I was brought up in and how I was brought up. We don't really like police officers. But it did kind of make me feel like my mom's being saved for like 30 minutes. So that was kinda cool.

...

Emily: How did the, like the general atmosphere of your household change when he was locked up for that long stretch of time?

Keisha: Um, I guess it was more quieter, less chaotic, I guess. Um, hmmm, just more mellow. Like everything kind of wired down, simmered down.

Naliah and Shantell discussed how their lives went into a tailspin after their dad was incarcerated – their mom started using drugs heavily, they became homeless, and they shuffled around between various shelters and foster homes for much of their childhoods. However, their father was incarcerated for raping their older sister—they clearly would not have been safe remaining in a house with him either. Their story illustrates what a mixed bag the incarceration of a parent can be for many children. In some ways it can provide relief, but this relief is often fleeting or overshadowed by other concerns.

This dissertation aims to examine the unique effects of parental incarceration itself, but the reflections of these and other respondents highlight the complex web of adverse life experiences that many children in this population face and the difficulty in isolating the effects of parental incarceration. While quantitative studies on the effects of parental incarceration generally utilize rich data that allow researchers to control for many background factors that tend to co-occur (for example, see Haskins 2016; Turney and Haskins 2014; Wildeman 2010; Wildeman and Western 2010), these stories draw attention to complexities in the qualitative experience of parental incarceration that are hard to capture with quantitative data. It is with this complex context in mind that I move forward with a discussion of variation in the responses to parental incarceration.

## Social withdrawal

As discussed in the previous chapter, almost half of all participants interviewed for this study described feelings of shame or embarrassment related to their parent's incarceration. These feelings were exacerbated by messages from caregivers that their parent's incarceration was to

be kept secret. For several, feelings of shame and explicit instructions to keep quiet about the details of their home life contributed to social withdrawal and isolation. Consistent with research on the effects of concealable stigma on psychological well-being, respondents who said they were ashamed or embarrassed by their parent's incarceration were more likely to report feelings of social isolation or impacts on their psychological well-being.

Respondents frequently felt that the secrecy around their parent's incarceration had broader impacts on their social behavior: reluctance to talk about their parent contributed to reluctance to open up to people more generally. For example, when asked whether she thought that her dad's incarceration had an impact on her behavior when she was young, Naliah responded "um, yeah. Like when I was younger, I was really guarded, and I didn't talk to people. I didn't talk to anyone 'cause I didn't think they'd understand. So I kind of kept to myself. And even when people did talk to me, I would rather be alone." Naliah said that, because she was more of a "stay back in the shadows kind of girl," people got the impression that she was "not friendly, or just unapproachable." Like Naliah, Diana believed that her father's incarceration had a lasting effect on her personality. Diana said that kids at school picked on her when they found out that her dad was in prison, and that the ridicule she received triggered a change—"I remember I was like, I was more withdrawn, like, after that happened. Because it was kind of embarrassing for me." Richard described similar feelings of isolation. When asked what he thought made parental incarceration different from separation from a parent for another reason, Richard said, "it's a lonely experience."

For some, social withdrawal was related both to a fear of ostracization and to the preoccupation with their parents incarceration. Shawn explained that he became withdrawn from school "because a lot of my energy was focused on my dad." Literature on the social

psychological effects of non-apparent stigma suggests that actively concealing one's stigma can be psychologically burdensome, and can have impacts on both interpersonal relationships and psychological well-being (Goffman 1963; Smart and Wegner 2000). Shawn described being acutely aware of the stigma associated with his father's incarceration, and didn't even share this information with his closest friends or romantic partners. His insights regarding the impact of his father's incarceration on his engagement with school reveal an understanding that the "energy" focused on the details of his home life and the preoccupation with keeping those details secret had real impacts on his own well-being.

Most respondents who discussed the social/psychological impacts of their parent's incarceration described them as deep and long-lasting. However, a few respondents described these effects as being more context-specific. For example, Monique would become "quiet and isolated" when she was faced with the decision to disclose her father's whereabouts to an adult, but not to her school peers:

I don't know, I never, like, it depends on the ages, or like, the circumstance. Like, I could tell, like, some kids at my elementary school, like "Oh were your dad?" "Oh he gone, he in jail." But when it came to adults, I don't know, I just never talked about it, I never wanted them to know, I never wanted them to ask questions. Like him bein' in jail, it just made me like quiet and isolated.

Shantell had a similar response when adults in her family were talking about her father and the things he had done to wind up in prison. She that much of the weight of her father's actions was on her shoulders, so when people around her were discussing it, she would react by disengaging:

It would make me mad. 'Cause I felt like I was bein', like, questioned, like I knew everything. 'Cause I felt, I felt like everybody came to me even though they were goin' to everybody sayin' it, but I felt like I was bein' the one targeted for some weird reason. So, I don't know, I didn't know how to handle it. I'd just go silent.

## Acting out

As discussed in Chapter 4, the stigma of parental incarceration is most frequently conceptualized as the assumption that the ‘criminality’ of incarcerated parents transfers to their children. As Naliah put it, “they think we’re gonna fail and become just like our parents, in jail.” Almost one third of respondents did describe situations in which they saw themselves or their siblings going down the same path as their parents. For most, this was a momentary lapse or adolescent phase. Others had more serious or sustained involvement in behaviors that resulted in their own contact with the criminal justice system. The notion of the self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton 1968) posits that people will behave in ways that others expect them to behave, regardless of their predisposition to do so. Limitations of the current data do not allow for a direct examination of this process whereby internalized stigma contributed to their own “acting out.” However, respondents’ narratives about times that they or their siblings got into trouble emerged as an important theme in their own reflections on the effects of parental incarceration.

For example, Shawn, Seth, and Nick all thought that their father’s incarceration made it seem like “no big deal” for them to get involved in illicit activities. They described their dads as setting the bar—whatever they did wouldn’t seem as bad because their dad had been there first:

Shawn: I had the feelin’ that because, um, my dad went to prison and it was no big deal for him, so if I ever got caught, I would just do my prison term like my dad did and be like “fuck it” you know.

Seth: Knowing that my dad was in jail made it seem like not that big of a deal that I was in jail. You know? If he was a goodie two-shoes I probably would’ve tried a lot harder to not do anything illegal. I guess since he was in jail it made it not that bad that I got incarcerated, or whatever.

Nick: ...some of the things that I’ve done I don’t think are so bad. You know, sometimes when I’m doing them – I don’t consciously justify them by saying “my dad went to prison for all this stuff, it’s cool if I just hit this rock” you know, um, but, sometimes I feel like, okay, you know, he set the threshold. If I do all those

things then I'll go to prison. But if I just do this and this, it's fine. Um, but my brother, which is a pretty good projection of what I could be, um, if I continue down this path, um he's really lowering that threshold, because he's gettin' in a lot of trouble with the legal system, and you know, it's really opening my eyes. Like I said, I really don't know all the dynamic of how different events have affected me, I'm just figuring this stuff out. But I know that the absence of my dad in my childhood, more specifically him being in prison, has definitely played a part in how I think about authority and what I can get away with.

Like Nick, a handful of respondents talked about siblings who showed tendencies to behave like their incarcerated parents. Nick said that his brother expressed a romanticized idea of his father's criminal history:

He's pulled me aside a few times and told me a few times that a lot of the times he was sellin' drugs and doin' drugs and stuff he would think about getting our dad's approval. You know, he would sort of like, I don't know, he had an idea of our dad that he was trying to live up to.

Jasmine shared similar thoughts about her brother, who had been kicked out of several schools, frequently got into fights, and was recently arrested for being in an abandoned house. Jasmine described her brother as "a spitting image of my dad." When asked how she thought her father's incarceration impacted her brother differently than it did her, Jasmine responded:

He looked up to my dad more than I did, and I look, I looked up to my mom, he looked up to my dad, and so I basically wanted to be like my mom, and he basically wanted to be like my dad. So, and every, everyone knew my dad. So the popularity thing kinda excited him, I would say.

Other respondents, like Jeremiah and Rita, didn't discuss *why* they thought they ended up following their parent's path, but drew parallels between their parent's life and their own:

Jeremiah: ... my parents' relationship began to reflect in my own personal life. And that scared me, and I saw that happening to me with different women I'd be with. I would get drunk and be abusive, and didn't care. I wouldn't hit 'em or nothin', but I'd be really like, just like how my father used to talk to my mother. I could destroy their whole emotion, I could totally flip on them and, you know, they would think I was some other person. And I became like my father in my relationships.

Rita: I ended up doing the same thing to my kids that my father did to me. I ended up going to jail, and leaving them for years at a time.

It is difficult to determine how much the stereotype-congruent behaviors of these individuals was a result of their parent's incarceration, or whether this can be attributed to stigmatization. There is evidence, however, that parental incarceration leads to increased risk of "antisocial behavior" (Craigie 2011; Murray et al. 2014; Wildeman 2010). The mechanisms driving this association remain unclear, but the accounts of these respondents reflect a notion that the stigma attached to parental incarceration could have an effect on self-perception. Research has shown that reflected appraisals—"self-conceptions formed on the perceptions of others toward the individual"(Matsueda 1992:1578)—exert a large effect on delinquent behavior.

### Choosing a different path

A large portion of respondents said that they coped with their parent's incarceration by working hard to take a different path. Latisha gave a succinct summary of this perspective when describing her parents' life choices: "they were a prime example of what I didn't want to be." This sentiment came up frequently in interviews, but the tenor of the discussion was slightly different for Project WHAT! participants than respondents not involved with the program. PW participants spoke more directly about actively resisting the negative stereotypes associated with the stigma of parental incarceration.

Alex, a PW participant, discussed his active resistance to the stigma of his father's incarceration. He said that he felt embarrassed about his dad's incarceration and avoided telling people about where his dad was because he thought they might see him differently – "maybe that I'll go on to the same path he went on, you know." In part, the fear that others might assume he would follow in his father's footsteps was due to the fact that he was named after his father and

grandfather – he was Alex III. He described the struggles he faced as a result of sharing the same name as his father and the efforts he has made to lead his life in a different direction. In this way, he was able to actively resist the associative stigma of his father’s incarceration:

... you know like I was saying earlier, you know, we share the same name. And um, you know, I used to not like my name. I hated my name for years. Like I would only write Alex S, not the III on my name cards, poems, homework assignments, because, you know, having the roman numerals annexed after my last name made me feel like I was gonna go down the same kind of pathway that my dad was on. And that wasn’t an option for me. So, um, you know... I wrote the story “name imprisonment” – the feeling that I was imprisoned because of my name. And kind of me finding my own outlet, or me coming up with a new meaning for Alex S. For, to set a new example for Alex S the IV, if there should be one.

Naliah's childhood was largely shaped by the domestic violence in her household and general life instability after her dad was incarcerated (including her mother’s substance abuse, homelessness, and involvement in foster care). She said that she had a hard time at school when she was young and going through a lot at home, but that she turned things around and worked really hard to succeed as she got older because she didn't want to end up how people expected her to end up as a result of her dad's incarceration.

I was like, “I can’t just give up.” Like, that’s what people expect me to do. Like, they think we’re, like, children of incarcerated parents, they think we’re gonna fail and become just like our parents, in jail. But um, I didn’t want to be that. I wanted to be a better role model for my sister and any other children goin’ through the same situation. So that’s, that, it moti—like him bein’ incarcerated motivated me more.

Jada has received strong messages from family members about the failings of her mother and the similarities they see in her. Jada wants to resist, but knows that it will be hard to break away from her parents’ legacy. Jada discussed this internal struggle in a conversation about plans for her future education:

Emily: Do you think that your parents' incarceration has made, has had an impact on your decisions about where you want to go with your schooling?

Jada: Um, it does. It makes me not want to follow in they path. But at the same time, lately I've been noticing, people have been telling me the way that I act and do certain things is like, we may be stuck in a situation like how your mother was. Where you just go crazy and do something you know you can't get yourself out of.

Emily: Okay. Um, and what do you think, what kind of impact has your parents' incarceration had on your decision to go to college?

Jada: It's made me wanna go to college so I don't be stuck in Oakland or in the area where it makes me choose and do bad decisions that I don't wanna make.

Jada had aspirations to go to college because she saw this as a way to escape what she and those around her saw as her fate. Jasmine also saw herself continuing onto higher education, and said that Project WHAT! was a key part of helping her develop these aspirations. She said that she didn't care about doing well in school when she was younger, but learning more about "the statistics" as part of PW has changed her outlook: "I don't know, it's just changed everything. I'm not gonna be a teen mom. I want to go to college. I'm going to graduate. I'm going to make something out of my life despite that my dad was incarcerated."

For these Project WHAT! respondents, finding ways to intentionally resist the stereotypes associated with parental incarceration was an important tool for coping with the stigma and changing the narrative about their parent's incarceration. In Trisha's words: "I think in my, in my own way I'm like re-writing her past. Like, I'm like fixing it."

Respondents who were not involved in Project WHAT! were generally less likely to frame discussions of the deterrent effects of parental incarceration in terms of resisting stereotypes, but almost one third shared sentiments that they had learned from their parents' mistakes and chosen a different path. For example, Stephanie knew that she didn't want to end up in prison like her dad:

Stephanie: I think it's definitely been easier to say no to things that would get me in trouble. Um, I think that if [my dad] wouldn't have been in jail, that maybe I would've done worse things. I've never been to jail, never been arrested, I have a couple of speeding tickets, but one's gonna drop off. Um, I don't really do drugs. I smoke a little bit of weed, but that's harmless. I don't really drink, I would never think about touching heroin or any- I don't have any respect for people that do hard hard drugs like they did. 'Cause they do bad things. I think that my dad wouldn't have done it if he wouldn't have been on the drugs, and things would've been different. I think because he was incarcerated, I have a better look on doing the right thing 'cause I don't want to go to jail, I'm not the person to go to jail, I don't want to do bad things. I think it has an effect like that.

Emily: Ok, so seeing what the result-

Stephanie: Seeing what he did, I don't want to spend 12 years of my life in jail. Like, pfft, what am I gonna do? I like to drive, people in jail can't drive. You can't eat the food that you want to do. I like to grocery shop, I'm just learning to sew. I wouldn't be able to do all those things if I was constantly being watched, so.

Emily: So you think that seeing him in there made you realize what the consequences would be?

Stephanie: Oh yeah.

Several respondents found themselves both emulating their parents and taking a different path at different points throughout their lives. Jeremiah explained that there was a very distinct moment where he realized that he was behaving like his father and made the conscious decision to turn it around. He described a fight he had with a girlfriend that brought about this transformation:

I had a brand new boom box, I was ignoring her, she slammed the boom box on the ground, we started throwin' stuff at each other, we started hitting each other, and it was the worst thing ever. So I left and went walking down the sidewalk, I just left and just went somewhere to clear my head and then I thought to myself, I said "Oh my god, I'm becoming my father." And that was scary, and it hurt me that I had slipped like that, 'cause I had always told myself that I would never be like him, and I saw the abusive relationship that him and my mother had reflected in my life, and it was just like, it was shocking. That's all I can say. You never know something about yourself 'til one day then it hits you, and I'm glad that I was able to recognize it so that I can correct that, so that I could correct it. And um, that was a turning point for me, the fight I had with her.

Some respondents, like Jada and Jeremiah, said that people drew similarities between them and their parents in situations where they were behaving badly and tried to adjust their behavior accordingly. Shannon experienced the flip side of these associations – she said the adults in her life chose to draw similarities between her actions and her father’s positive traits. This encouraged her to stay out of trouble:

...everybody always tells me I’m the best part of my dad. ‘Cause I don’t do everything to mess my life up, you know? Like I try really hard to not fall in the same paths that my mom and my dad did. Like I don’t want to be an alcoholic who doesn’t take care of her kids, and I don’t wanna be in jail if I have kids, you know. So I think they affected my life for the better.

For Victor, the choice to take a different path than his father was driven by a desire to show love and appreciation for his mother. He said that seeing what his father did to hurt his mother made him want to do things differently. When discussing how he talked about his father’s incarceration with other friends who had gone through similar things, Victor said:

Like we just talk about like, um, our parents being in jail, like not being there. And then like how it made us like the people that we are today. It’s like, for me, like I feel like my dad being in jail and like not being there and seeing like what it did to my mom, I felt like it made me like closer to my mom and respect my mom so much more because I feel like, like she like sacrificed so much. Like, she never quit. You know, even though she was like an only parent raising all 4 of us kids, like she never let us see her crying. You know, she just was always strong. And I just like felt like that was like motivation to want to like do good, and to be good, to show her that, you know, she did something.

Later, when reflecting on other ways that his father’s incarceration impacted the way he chose to live his life, Victor returned to the idea that his dad provided an example of what he didn’t want to become:

Victor: Like I find myself trying to be everything that he’s not. Like trying to be the opposite of what he does. Like he had problems saving, so I try to make it like a goal for myself to be able to save money like in the bank. Like he’s always angry, so I try to, I always have like a positive attitude even if things aren’t going the way I want them to... I didn’t want to end up like that, like always angry. Like

I felt like he was always like mad and like nothing could ever be right. So yeah, there was always like a problem with something.

Emily: For him?

Victor: Yeah. And I didn't want to end up like that, I just wanted to be, like, positive.

## Opening up

### *Social support: combatting internalized stigma*

As discussed in Chapter 4, respondents were generally uncomfortable discussing the details of their parent's incarceration in most contexts. However, for those who did chose to open up about this part of their life, it was often a source of relief:

Jasmine: I would keep a whole lot of stuff in, and you could tell on my face that there was something wrong with me. So after school they would be like, "oh is there anything wrong, anything you want to talk about?" And that's when I just poured it out.

Emily: How did that feel to pour it out?

Jasmine: It felt good to finally get some stuff off my chest.

Emily: So you opened up to [your mentor] about everything before you started PW?

Naliah: Yeah.

Emily: How did it feel for you to first open up to her about it?

Naliah: It was, it was, it was relaxing. Because we would always talk about everything, but then when she'll ask about my dad, it was just like "nope, we're not going there. We're not talking about that." And then one day she was like "why don't you like talkin' about your dad? Why don't, 'cause whenever I bring it up, you just change the subject." ... But when I did tell her, I was relieved I did. Because, um, she didn't treat me differently. She looked at me like I was stronger. She was like "that didn't make you weak, that made you stronger. You shouldn't be ashamed of it anymore." So yeah, she's awesome.

Emily: the first time you had to tell anybody your story, what was it like?

Raven: It was kinda like, it made me feel sad. It made me feel like it only happened yesterday. It was hard to talk about it. And it was the first time I ever told the full story to somebody. So, it was like, I felt relief after it though.

Respondents found that discussing their parent's incarceration with others, especially with people who had experienced similar life challenges, helped them to cope with their past and feel less isolated.

This topic was brought up most frequently by Project WHAT! participants, because sharing their story with each other (and, subsequently, people outside of the group) was a requirement for participation in the program. While non-PW participants were far less likely to have opened up to anyone about their parents' incarceration, a few said that they had talked about it with friends who had also experienced parental incarceration. When Victor was asked what these conversations were like, he said "Like we just talk about our parents being in jail, like not being there. And then like how it made us like the people that we are today." Both Jeremiah and Tanya described how it's comforting to talk with someone who has gone through the same sorts of things:

Jeremiah: ...when you can relate to someone about a similar situation, um, it's pretty open. It's not hurtful or painful to talk about it with them, or me, we both know I have a situation in family, my friend here had a situation in his family, and we'll just talk about it, you know, and it's pretty easy. It's no stress at all.

Tanya: : I guess, well I didn't talk too much, but it was interesting to know that there was other people out there that had to deal with that. I don't know necessarily about their whole life, I've only met one of my friends that have dealt with that her whole life like me, but um, it's, it is comforting to know, I guess. And even now, it's still nice to know and talk to my friends out there that, their dad isn't in there for the same thing, but they have been in there, and they get letters, and calls, and they get to go visit, and, you know.

Project WHAT! participants frequently reported that the group was helpful for them because, as Raven put it, they all "have each other's back." Youth involved in PW start with a week-long summer training and writing session, which culminates in a "sharing circle" during which they all read a story they've written about their parent's incarceration to each other.

Everyone who discussed their experience with the sharing circle described it as a very emotional but supportive experience. For many, this was the first time they had spoken openly about their parent's incarceration. Being surrounded by others who were in a similar vulnerable place helped them face any fears they might have had and helped them to bond as a group. Shantell describes her experience in the sharing circle as follows:

Because I was holding in so many emotions, and I never talked about a lot of stuff, but then, with them, I just felt like I was very safe to talk about it. Because I wasn't gonna be judged at the end of the day. And I wasn't going to be looked down on because of the situation I'm in at the end of the day. So, it just brought back a whole lot of memories, and emotions, and—I really liked it, though. I didn't like the crying and stuff, but I really liked it.

For many respondents, discussing their parent's incarceration as part of Project WHAT! encouraged them to be more open in other contexts. This increased openness helped to mitigate the feelings of isolation. For instance, Jada said several times in her interview that she was a “keep to myself type of person,” but following her participation with Project WHAT! she didn't feel like she had to hold in the details of her life:

It make me feel more comfortable, like I can tell, like, people, like, when I say stuff about like my life, like oh I have to go, my auntie's coming to pick me up, they're like, “oh, where's your parents at?” And I'll be more open, like, “okay, my mom is deceased and my dad is in jail.” Like I'd be more open about it. It made me feel more comfortable and open up the shell of me not wanting to open it up.

For many, involvement in Project WHAT! helped assuage fears of being unfairly judged based on their parent's incarceration:

Jasmine: I'm more comfortable with sharing it now. And now I don't really care what people think... “I don't care how you feel, I don't care what you think, I'm going through what I'm going through, I don't care what you're goin' through. Well, I care what you're goin' though, but I don't. I don't care what you think of me havin' my dad in jail.” It doesn't really bother me.

Raven: ... I kind of come out with it a little. I talk about it. My mom's incarceration. And I feel confident about it. At first I wasn't. Like, I was embarrassed.

Project WHAT! participants who said that they were reluctant to disclose information about their parent's incarceration prior to the program overwhelmingly reported that this changed once they joined the program. According to Trisha, "now that's all do is talk about my mom" (laughter).

Project WHAT! participants frequently brought up the importance of connecting with other children of incarcerated parents for making them feel less alone. According to Raven, "I finally look at it as I'm not the only one out there with a parent in jail. So it's like I have other people." Jada also said that she wasn't ashamed to talk about her parents' incarceration anymore, because "now, being in PW, I know it's not just me, it's other people too, so I'm more open about it." Similarly, when asked how she thought her participation in Project WHAT! had impacted her life, Keisha said "I've been impacted to know that I'm not alone. I've been impacted to know that this *is* normal."

Participation in Project WHAT! not only provided youth with a safe, supportive space to talk about their parent's incarceration, but also gave them a better understanding of the structural/cultural forces that contribute to high rates of incarceration in their communities. Learning about mass incarceration from a social justice perspective helped insulate these youth from the psychological effects of stigma, because they were aware of the forces beyond their control that led to their parent's incarceration. They also had a venue to discuss expectations and experiences of prejudice.

Crocker and Major's theory of the self-protective properties of stigma (Crocker & Major, 1989, 2003) posits that perceptions of prejudice can mitigate the negative effect of stigma on

self-esteem. This perspective is confirmed by the experience of Project WHAT! participants. Several PW youth described a marked change in their confidence/self-esteem after joining the program. Through discussions about their experiences with other youth, program facilitators, and public audiences, PW participants developed a more nuanced structural understanding of the stigma of parental incarceration. These youth came to understand that rejection by peers and teachers' lowered expectations (of behavior or academic performance) could result from other people's prejudice rather than their own shortcomings (Crocker & Quinn, 1998; Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998).

The experience of opening up and finding solidarity with other children of incarcerated parents also happened for some youth outside of PW. Two PW participants discussed situations at school where teachers had initiated conversations in the classrooms that encouraged students to open up about their parent's incarceration. Shantell's math teacher was doing an icebreaker at the beginning of the school year where he asked each student to say something that people didn't know about them. The teacher started them off by sharing that his mother was incarcerated. Shantell said that almost half of the students in the class shared that they had a parent incarcerated as well – "Like everybody in the room had somebody incarcerated, but about seven or eight had a parent incarcerated. And that was, I don't know, that stood out to me." Shantell said that she wasn't all that surprised that so many of her classmates had a parent in prison, but she was surprised and impressed that so many other students were willing to talk about it.

Shantell's sister Naliah had a similar experience. She told her government teacher that her dad was incarcerated, and he created a whole unit to discuss incarceration. The class read The New Jim Crow (Alexander 2010), and in the context of a discussion about the book the teacher said "if you have a friend or a family member that have [been incarcerated], you could

write about it or you could talk to me about it, or if you feel it you could share it out right now.” Naliah said that about ten students raised their hands to indicate that someone in their family had been incarcerated. She said that this approach was a really great way low-pressure way to bring visibility to the issue of parental incarceration and create a sense of solidarity while not putting people on the spot – “it brought us closer together in a way. And by him not *making us* say it, it gave us more of an option and made us open up in our own way, when we wanted to.”

Both of these respondents attended high school in a high-poverty neighborhood comprised mostly of black and Latinx families. According to Shantell, “it’s a whole lot of kids at [my school] that have a parent incarcerated.” As with PW, these experiences of opening up in a room with other people who shared similar experiences was a really great way to help them feel a sense of affinity with other students and to collectively reduce the stigma. Having frank conversations about parental incarceration got it out in the open so students didn’t have to feel like it was a dirty little secret.

### *Broadening knowledge: combatting cultural stigma*

The experience Shantell and Naliah had in their high school classrooms helped to combat stigma in two ways: first, by creating a safe space for people to share their experience and receive support from trusted adults, and second by bringing conversations out in the open and working to change the broader narrative about parental incarceration. As an organization, the aim of Project WHAT! is to address both of these dimensions. In interviews and focus groups, PW participants frequently discussed how the program was a strong source of social support that helped to reduce the shame and secrecy around parental incarceration on a personal level. A handful of PW participants also talked about the power of the program to broaden knowledge about the impacts of parental incarceration and mass incarceration more generally. These

respondents saw themselves not only as personally benefitting from the program, but as fighting against the stigma of parental incarceration at a cultural level by making their stories visible.

Trisha was a peer mentor for Project WHAT!. She talked at length about her experience presenting as part of PW, and the impact she feels the program makes on their audiences. She said that she could see how the stories they tell are making a difference. For instance, she described an interaction she had at a conference with a man who had heard one of her peers tell their story the weekend before. She said that her PW peer's story had encouraged this man to open up about his own story:

...he was a grown man, and he had never spoke about his parent's incarceration or anything, and then, um, when I was there, he talked about it. And just, it was all because he had heard one story. And it like, you know, like, it opened up a lot of eyes. I just feel like it opens up a lot, and I feel like a lot of the time we don't realize how much it does change. Because like that was, that was instantly, it changed him instantly, but sometimes stuff is more prolonged. But I do, I definitely think we impact every single person that hears our stories, whether or not they like the fact that we've impacted them.

Trisha shared similar sentiments during a focus group:

...I like doing our presentations and talking to people because you can, well I can see, like, how it affects people, and like, how sometimes it like instantly like changes, like, something will like click in them, it's almost like a lightbulb goes on, and I think that's what I like most about talking to people about it, because sometimes you can see right away what, what like, what you're doing, and how it's helping.

Prior to her involvement with Project WHAT!, Bianca was eager to learn more about the criminal justice system so she got an internship with a community organization dedicated to prison reform. As part of that internship, she created three workshops for eighth graders that covered the prison industrial complex, impacts of incarceration, and alternatives to a broken system. While she didn't always talk about her own experience with parental incarceration during those workshops, they had a similar effect of broadening knowledge and making space

for others to open up about their incarcerated family members: “I got a lot of thank yous, and I got a lot of, you know, a lot of kids came up to me and told me that their parents were in jail, told me like their aunties or uncles were in jail.” I saw a similar exchange take place at a presentation PW conducted for a group of high school students. When asked if there was anything they had learned following the presentation, a student said “I don’t feel alone now.”

Project WHAT! centers much of its programming around “The Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents,” a document created by the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership as a guideline for framing legal and practical efforts to improve the experience of children of incarcerated parents (see Appendix A for more details). PW participants use the Bill of Rights as inspiration when writing a story of their experience with parental incarceration as part of their weeklong summer training. These stories are shared during presentations for a wide variety of audiences, including teachers, social workers, police officers, and lawmakers. PW participants understand that, in addition broadening understanding of the experience of parental incarceration, sharing their stories has an impact on the way that these groups do their jobs. For example, Raven talked about how she really hoped her story of being left at home alone with her teenage sister after her mother was arrested would help police to improve their practices with regard to children.

PW youth’s outreach and consciousness-raising is not limited to official presentations. Alex said that he had also shared the Bill of Rights with students in his communications class: “just bein’ able to learn all the knowledge from Project WHAT! and to pass it onto people who don’t know, or who could care less to know, is amazing. And to be able to, to utilize that outside of Project WHAT!, it’s incredible.” This is an illustration of, Project WHAT!’s mission to create a space for children of incarcerated parents to share their experiences. In doing so, these youth

find social support, help to educate the broader community, and ultimately change the cultural narrative about children of incarcerated parents.

### Discussion: patterns in responses to parental incarceration

As discussed in Chapter 4, non-white respondents were more likely than white respondents to have felt stigmatized as a result of their parent's incarceration. The current analysis also revealed racialized patterns in the response to parental incarceration. As shown in Table 4, non-white respondents were more likely than white respondents to report that they became socially withdrawn/isolated following their parent's incarceration. While quantitative research has not shown clear differences in the magnitude of the effects of parental incarceration based on race (Foster and Hagan 2009; Turney and Wildeman 2015; Wildeman and Turney 2014), this finding provides further evidence that the experience of parental incarceration is qualitatively different for white and non-white children.

Non-white respondents were also slightly less likely to report that they had deliberately chosen to take a different path than their parents, and slightly more likely to report that they or their siblings had found themselves following in their parents' footsteps (see Table 4). This finding is supported by Jada's statement that, for young people of color (particularly black boys), "they're already buildin' cells for you startin' at kindergarten." It could be argued that, within the confines of the structurally racist society that gave rise to mass incarceration (Alexander 2010; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Western 2007), white children are given more freedom to "choose a different path" than their non-white peers.

*Table 4: Race and response to parental incarceration*

<b>Response to Parental Incarceration</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Non-white</b>	<b>Total</b>
Acted out	4 (29%)	7 (32%)	11 (31%)
Chose a different path	7 (50%)	9 (41%)	16 (44%)
Became socially withdrawn	2 (14%)	7(32%)	9 (25%)
Combated stigma by telling story	2 (14%)	12 (55%)	14 (39%)

Note: There were a total of 14 white and 22 non-white respondents.

Examining racial patterns in the response to parental incarceration also revealed that non-white respondents were more likely to have coped with the internalized stigma or the cultural stigma of parental incarceration by sharing their story with others. This pattern is driven in large part by Project WHAT! participants, who were mostly non-white. Table 5 shows how responses to parental incarceration differed between respondents involved in Project WHAT! and those who were not. As would be expected based on the mission and structure of the program, PW participants were much more likely to have discussed their parent's incarceration with others. While some PW respondents said that they occasionally had behavioral issues in school or behaved in other ways that could be seen as stereotype-congruent, they were less likely to have gotten into serious trouble than non-PW respondents. It is possible that youth who are motivated to succeed self-select into Project WHAT!, but the social, emotional, and financial support they receive through the program could also contribute to keeping PW participant out of trouble.

*Table 5: Project WHAT! participation and response to parental incarceration*

<b>Response to Parental Incarceration</b>	<b>Project WHAT! Participant</b>	<b>Non-Participant</b>
Acted out	3 (19%)	8 (40%)
Chose a different path	6 (38%)	10 (50%)
Became social withdrawn	6 (38%)	3 (15%)
Combated stigma by telling story	11 (31%)	3 (15%)

Note: There were a total of 16 PW participants and 20 non-participants

Interestingly, Project WHAT! participants were more likely than non-participants to report having experienced social withdrawal and isolation resulting from the stigma of parental incarceration. For some, these feelings were revealed in conversations about how they had been impacted by their participation in Project WHAT!—they described how the program had sparked a change in their personality. They said that they used to be shy or guarded, but PW encouraged them to come out of their shell. It could be that this change was driven by PW, but it could also be that PW gave participants the opportunity to discuss their own experience with other youth who were also children of incarcerated parents, and in doing so, youth came up with a shared meanings of the impact of parental incarceration. Through these conversations and collective understandings, PW youth could come to identify the effects of parental incarceration and interpret them in ways that other respondents did not.

In sum, respondents described three main responses to their parent's incarceration: 1) social withdrawal, 2) following in their parent's footsteps, 3) actively choosing a different path. Response to parental incarceration varied by race and by participation in Project WHAT!, with non-white and PW respondents reporting more feelings of social withdrawal/isolation and white respondents being more likely to discuss having "chosen a different path." Several respondents, mostly those who participated with Project WHAT!, found that opening up and talking to others about the experience of parental incarceration was useful for both finding social support to mitigate the effects of parental incarceration, and for influencing perceptions of children of incarcerated parents held by society at large. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, decisions about if and when to disclose information about parental incarceration is complex and can have implications for the way children are viewed/treated by others. In Part III of this dissertation, I

will examine how knowledge about a parent's incarceration can shape the perceptions and behaviors of teachers.

## **PART III**

## Chapter 6: Quantitative Data & Methods

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In Part II of this dissertation, the stigma of parental incarceration was examined from the perspective of youth and young adults who have experienced the incarceration of a parent. When reflecting on their own experience, several respondents mentioned feeling that teachers and other adults viewed them differently than their peers who had not had a parent incarcerated. In some cases, this took the form of pity/lowered expectations. Others felt that they would be perceived as more culpable or prone to bad behavior as a result of their parent's incarceration. In Part III, I use a factorial survey to determine whether these feelings of culpability are reflected in teachers' implicit attitudes toward children of incarcerated parents and reactions to misbehavior.

### Data

This study uses a factorial survey of 206 teachers to parse out the effects of various student characteristics on the disciplinary decisions made by teachers. In a factorial survey, respondents are asked to rate a sample of vignettes that vary across a given set of dimensions. This design allows the researcher to combine the benefits of experimental methods and social surveys – allowing for the complexity afforded by traditional surveys while imposing the factor orthogonality that is characteristic of experiments (Wallander 2009). In other words, systematically varying several factors that might influence judgments makes it possible to isolate the independent effects of characteristics that are ordinarily associated. The use of a factorial survey is appropriate for examining the independent effects of teacher's bias with regard to parental incarceration on disciplinary decision-making, since parental incarceration tends to be highly correlated with a variety of other social characteristics, most notably race. For example, research shows that people implicitly associate black males with criminality (Eberhardt et al.

2004; Goff et al. 2008). Research has also shown that black and Latinx individuals face harsher sanctions than their white peers in a variety of contexts, particularly when they display stereotype-congruent behavior (Harris et al. 2011; Jones and Kaplan 2003; Schram et al. 2009). Allowing for variation in race and gender provides an opportunity to isolate the effect of parental incarceration (the courtesy stigma of parent's criminality) from the effects of race and gender (the stigma of black maleness) on the actions and attitudes of teachers.

I relied on prior research to develop hypothetical classroom scenarios, scales for behavioral attributions<sup>12</sup>, and likely discipline responses (Brophy and Rohrkemper 1981; Clark 1997; Hughes et al. 1993; Kulinna 2007; Mavropoulou and Padeliadu 2002; Poulou and Norwich 2000). The construction of vignettes was further informed by two focus groups and two individual interviews with teachers in the Seattle area. The 13 teachers I spoke with taught in a broad range of schools, primarily from Bellevue School District and Highline School District—two very different districts, demographically. In Bellevue School District, 3% of students are black, 11% are Latinx, and 21% are eligible for free or reduced lunch. In Highline School District, 11% of students are black, 36% are Latinx, and 68% are eligible for free or reduced lunch ("Washington State Report Card"). Teachers were asked to discuss the most frequent types of behavioral issues they encountered in their classrooms and ways they were likely to respond. Teachers were also asked whether they knew if they had ever had any kids in their class who had a parent in prison, and if so, how they discovered this information. The focus groups helped to refine the content of vignettes by confirming the types of misbehavior teachers commonly face.

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<sup>12</sup> Note: attributional scales used in prior research typically ask teachers to rate approximately 10-30 likely causes of behavior, which align with family, child, teacher, and school factors (see Kulinna 2007). However, constraints on the length of the current survey only allowed for 6 attributional responses (3 internal, and 3 external).

Once vignettes were constructed, I conducted a pilot survey with 24 respondents to further confirm that the scenarios described in the vignettes seemed realistic.

Following the pilot study, a factorial survey was conducted through Time Sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (TESS). TESS is an NSF-funded data collection effort managed by an interdisciplinary team of academics. TESS conducted the survey through their partnership with Knowledge Network (a government and academic research group within the GfK group, a large global survey research organization). The survey was distributed to a subgroup of 206 teachers within a nationally representative, probability-based web panel called “KnowledgePanel.” These teachers were part of a larger pool of subjects who periodically take part in surveys conducted by Knowledge Network. Subjects take the surveys voluntarily, and are compensated for their participation.

Respondents were asked to read five randomly-constructed vignettes and rate how likely they would be to respond in a variety of ways. In each vignette, students were randomly assigned a behavioral incident (snapping a pencil and throwing it at another student, shoving another student, refusing to work, knocking another student’s art project off their desk, or playing with their cell phone under the desk); gender and race/ethnicity (signaled by name<sup>13</sup>: Tanner, Molly, Jamal, Tynisha, Jorge, Alejandra); and father’s absence (present, deceased, military, incarcerated). Because father’s incarceration was the independent variable of interest, each teacher received at least one vignette that included an incarcerated father. Every other category within each of the four dimensions (behavior, race, gender, reason for father’s absence) had an equal chance of selection in the construction of the vignettes, with the exception of two behavior

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<sup>13</sup> Previous experimental studies have shown that name is an accurate signifier of race (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Schram et al. 2009).

conditions that were available only to K-6 or 7-12 students (knocking sculpture off desk and playing with cell phone, respectively). Other factors thought to influence discipline decisions were held constant in all vignettes (presence of an individualized education plan, history of misbehavior, and level of escalation following the incident). A description of the prevalence of each dimension in the total vignette sample (N=1030) is provided in Table 6.

Table 6: Vignette characteristics

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Father's absence		
<i>father present</i>	225	22%
<i>father incarcerated</i>	335	32%
<i>father deceased</i>	226	22%
<i>father in the military</i>	244	24%
Student gender		
<i>boy</i>	521	51%
<i>girl</i>	509	49%
Student race		
<i>white</i>	324	31%
<i>black</i>	369	36%
<i>Latinx</i>	337	33%
Student behavior		
<i>snaps pencil</i>	264	26%
<i>shoves student</i>	251	24%
<i>refuses task</i>	258	25%
<i>knocks sculpture</i>	134	13%
<i>plays with cell phone</i>	123	12%

Following each vignette, teachers were asked questions about how they might respond to the incident and factors that could have contributed to the student's misbehavior. An example of one randomly constructed vignette and the response questions is presented below:

Tanner doesn't have an IEP, and has never had any major behavior issues in your classroom. You had his sister in your class last year, and remember their mom telling you that things were hard at home since their dad went to prison the previous year. You see Tanner shove another student while they are on their way into the classroom. The other student stumbles backward and is visibly shaken up.

When you discretely call attention to the behavior, the student becomes defensive. How likely are you to respond to this behavior in the following ways:

	Not at all likely	Slightly likely	Moderately likely	Very likely	Extremely likely
Keep the student in from recess	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Send the student to a break room or out into the hall	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Refer the student to the principal's office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ignore the behavior	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Call the police or school resource officer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate how likely it is that the following factors might be a cause of the problem behavior described in the vignette:

	Not at all likely	Slightly likely	Moderately likely	Very likely	Extremely likely
Student is a troublemaker	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Rough neighborhood	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of self-control	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Large class size	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chaos in the home environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Low intelligence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Both disciplinary and attributional responses tended to be highly skewed, with very few respondents answering “very likely” or “extremely likely.” Among disciplinary responses, teachers were most likely to report that they would respond to misbehavior by sending a student out of the classroom or keep the student in from lunch or recess. As would be expected, teachers were least likely to report that they would respond to misbehavior by calling the police or a school resource officer. Teachers were most inclined to report that lack of self-control and chaos

at home were likely causes of misbehavior. A summary of disciplinary and attitudinal responses is displayed in Table 7.

*Table 7: Teacher disciplinary and attributional responses*

<b>Disciplinary Response</b>	<b>Not at all likely</b>	<b>Slightly likely</b>	<b>Moderately likely</b>	<b>Very likely</b>	<b>Extremely likely</b>
<i>Ignore the behavior (N=1020)</i>	79.4%	11.6%	6.3%	2.2%	0.6%
<i>Keep the student in from lunch or recess (N=1021)</i>	42.2%	20.2%	19.1%	15.2%	3.3%
<i>Send the student out of the classroom (N=1025)</i>	31.6%	21.8%	23.2%	18.2%	5.2%
<i>Refer student to principal's office (N=1021)</i>	52.3%	22.8%	13.5%	7.7%	3.6%
<i>Call the police or school resource officer (N=1021)</i>	90.6%	4.6%	3.3%	1.4%	0.1%
<b>Attributional Response</b>	<b>Not at all likely</b>	<b>Slightly likely</b>	<b>Moderately likely</b>	<b>Very likely</b>	<b>Extremely likely</b>
<b>Internal Attributions</b>					
<i>Student is a troublemaker (N=1016)</i>	59.4%	27.6%	9.4%	3.5%	0.2%
<i>Lack of self-control (N=1024)</i>	20.5%	34.0%	25.1%	16.3%	4.1%
<i>Low intelligence (N=1018)</i>	68.4%	21.6%	8.3%	1.7%	0.1%
<b>External Attributions</b>					
<i>Large class size (N=1020)</i>	36.3%	32.5%	23.8%	5.2%	2.3%
<i>Chaos at home (N=1021)</i>	7.2%	18.5%	27.5%	28.7%	18.0%
<i>Rough neighborhood (N=1014)</i>	39.7%	37.2%	17.1%	5.6%	0.4%

In addition to the experimentally controlled vignette-level variables, the dataset contains teacher-level characteristics such as race/ethnicity, gender, years of teaching experience, political

ideology, religion, and region. Teachers were also asked to report school-level characteristics including type of school (elementary, middle, high), approximate percent black, approximate percent Latinx, and approximate percent free or reduced lunch. Teachers were mostly women (67%), white (81%), and elementary school teachers (49%). Descriptive information about the respondents (N=206) is provided in Table 8.

*Table 8: Teacher and school characteristics*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent/mean (sd)</b>
Teacher gender		
<i>man</i>	68	33%
<i>woman</i>	138	67%
Teacher race		
<i>white</i>	166	81%
<i>black</i>	12	6%
<i>Latinx</i>	15	7%
<i>multiracial</i>	5	2%
<i>other</i>	8	4%
Teacher age		45.3 (13)
Teacher years of experience		15.8 (10)
Teacher political ideology		
<i>Extremely liberal</i>	13	6%
<i>Liberal</i>	40	19%
<i>Slightly liberal</i>	22	11%
<i>Moderate</i>	45	22%
<i>Slightly conservative</i>	28	14%
<i>Conservative</i>	49	24%
<i>Extremely conservative</i>	9	4%
Teacher region		
<i>Northeast</i>	45	22%
<i>Midwest</i>	50	24%
<i>South</i>	63	31%
<i>West</i>	48	23%
Type of school		
<i>elementary</i>	101	49%
<i>middle</i>	34	17%
<i>high school</i>	71	34%
School % free/reduced lunch		48% (33)
School % black		21% (25)
School % Latinx		22% (25)

## Analytic method

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was first conducted to test the validity and reliability of the latent internal and external constructs measured by the six attributional response variables. The CFA was estimated with the `{lavaan}` package in R, using diagonally weighted least squared with robust standard errors and a mean and variance adjusted test statistic (WLSMV) (Rosseel, 2012). This method is specifically designed for ordinal data and makes no distributional assumptions about the observed variables (Li, 2016). Therefore, it is an appropriate method of estimation for the highly-skewed attitudinal response variables. This analysis revealed that the variables used to measure internal attributions (“student is a troublemaker,” “lack of self-control,” and “low intelligence”) are relatively good indicators of the latent construct. However, the variables measuring external attributions (“rough neighborhood,” “large class size,” and “chaos at home”) failed to converge on a valid latent construct. Likewise, the Cronbach’s alpha for each construct obtained from the scale construction (`scoreItems` function in the `{psych}` package, Revelle 2017) indicate that the internal scale is reliable ( $\alpha=0.7$ ), whereas the external scale is not ( $\alpha=0.5$ ). For these reasons, the internal attributions will be treated as a single continuous scale in the analyses and the external attributions will each be treated as distinct continuous variables. Results from the confirmatory factor analysis can be found in Appendix B. An exploratory factor analyses was also conducted to examine whether there was a latent structure underlying the disciplinary responses, but no such structure was found.

Models were specified using Bayesian model averaging, a statistical approach that accounts for model uncertainty in variable selection (Hoeting et al. 1999; Raftery 1995). Classic hypothesis testing in sociological research often selects models in one of two ways: 1) by including all possible control variables and risking loss of precision of parameter estimates, or 2)

by adding/removing variables in a stepwise fashion and increasing the probability of finding significant variables by chance alone (Raftery 1995). Rather than trusting that the models selected are well-specified and thus produce reliable parameter estimates, the Bayesian approach allows for the selection of the most probable model based on the data (Raftery 1995). The `bic.glm` function in the R package {BMA} (Raftery et al. 2017) averages over all possible sets of predictors to select a subset that best balance goodness of fit and model complexity based on the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC). While the models selected through this process are of a generalized linear form and do not take account of the multilevel structure of the data, they provided a baseline set of models from which to further examine the fit of multilevel models as described below.

The effects of parental incarceration on teacher's disciplinary decisions were estimated using multilevel varying intercept models. Each of the 206 teachers surveyed were asked to respond to five vignettes, resulting in hierarchically nested data. The two-level data structure violates assumptions of independent observations necessary for ordinary least squared (OLS) estimation, because each teacher's responses are likely to be similar to one another (and thus contain correlated errors). The multilevel varying intercept model allows for a simultaneous estimation of the vignette-level and respondent-level effects. In effect, this strategy controls for each individual teacher's baseline propensities toward certain kinds of discipline. The varying intercept model takes the following form:

$$\begin{aligned}
 y_i &= \alpha_{j[i]} + \beta x_i + \varepsilon_i, i = 1, \dots, n \\
 \varepsilon_i &\overset{\text{iid}}{\sim} N(0, \sigma_\varepsilon^2) \\
 \alpha_j &\overset{\text{iid}}{\sim} N(\mu_\alpha, \sigma_\alpha^2), j = 1, \dots, J
 \end{aligned}$$

where  $y_i$  represents the teacher response to vignette  $i$ ,  $x_i$  represents explanatory variables in vignette  $i$ ,  $\beta$  represents coefficients for the explanatory variables,  $\varepsilon_i$  represents vignette-level random error, and  $\alpha_j$  representing the teacher-level random effect.

The multilevel varying intercept models were estimated in R using the `lmer` function from the `{lmerTest}` package. This function utilizes a penalized least squares algorithm to produce maximum likelihood estimates of the parameters and Satterthwaite approximation for t-tests to assess significance of the fixed effects (Bates et al. 2015; Kuznetsova, Bruun Brockhoff, and Haubo Bojesen Christensen 2016). In these models, the response variables are assumed to be continuous and normally distributed. Due to the ordinal nature of the disciplinary response variables, supplementary ordered probit models were estimated using cumulative links mixed models in the R package `{ordinal}` (Christensen 2015). As the two techniques produced similar results, linear estimates are presented for ease of interpretation. Results from the ordered probit estimation can be found in Appendix C.

## Chapter 7: Parental Incarceration and Teacher Response to Classroom Misbehavior

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Research in both criminal justice and school discipline contexts has shown that ascribed characteristics, particularly race, can impact perceptions of “blameworthiness,” and these perceptions influence decisions about punishment. In a criminal justice context, studies have revealed that the delinquency of black and brown youth is more likely to be attributed to internal rather than external factors, that these youth are less likely to be viewed as reformable than white youth, and that they are subject to harsher punishment as a result (Bridges and Steen 1998; Fader, Kurlychek, and Morgan 2014). Similarly, aggressive behaviors are more likely to be viewed as caused by dispositional rather than situational attributes when the perpetrator is black (Duncan 1976). Research in an educational context shows that black students are more likely to be viewed as “troublemakers” than their white peers, and that teachers think black students’ misbehavior should be met with more severe discipline (Okonofua and Eberhardt 2015). The parental incarceration literature suggests that children of incarceration could face similar perceptions due to the associative stigma of their parent’s apparent criminality.

If the associative stigma of parental incarceration does, in fact, impact the way teachers perceive student misbehavior, there could be implications for the way teachers respond. In turn, differences in disciplinary response could contribute to the educational detainment of children of incarcerated parents. Research suggests that gaps in educational achievement across racial and ethnic groups are closely tied to gaps in suspension and expulsion (Gregory et al. 2010). Moreover, police presence in schools increases the likelihood that school discipline will result in criminal justice contact for students of color. Research has also shown that parental incarceration has an effect on teachers’ expectations of problem behavior (Wildeman et al. 2017) and actual

behavior (Craigie 2011; Geller et al. 2012; Haskins 2014, 2015; Johnson 2009; Murray et al. 2012; Perry and Bright 2012; Wakefield and Wildeman 2014; Wildeman 2010). This analysis will examine whether inequalities in discipline may contribute to the inequalities in education revealed in literature on parental incarceration (Foster and Hagan 2007; Turney and Haskins 2014) by assessing the impact of having a father in prison on teachers' choices about classroom discipline. This chapter will examine whether parental incarceration has an effect on both teachers' perceptions of the cause of student misbehavior and their disciplinary response. In doing so, it will contribute to our understanding of the role of stigma in shaping the educational experience of children of incarcerated parents.

## Parental incarceration and behavioral attributions

I use factorial survey data to examine whether teachers' perceptions of the cause of classroom misbehavior are different for children with incarcerated parents than their peers. As described in Chapter 6, 206 teachers were each presented with five vignettes describing a behavioral incident and asked to rate the likelihood that the behavior was caused by six factors (student is a troublemaker, lack of self-control, low intelligence, rough neighborhood, large class size, and chaos at home). The three internal behavioral attributions (troublemaker, lack of self-control, and low intelligence) were combined into an "internal" composite score. The three external behavioral attributions (bad neighborhood, class size, and chaos at home) are evaluated individually. As expected, parental incarceration contributed to higher scores on the internal attribution scale. This indicates that teachers are more inclined to attribute misbehavior to intrinsic traits among children of incarcerated parents, perhaps as a result of associative stigma. Interestingly, parental incarceration was also found to be positively correlated with two of the three external attributions – neighborhood context and chaos at home.

Table 9 illustrates patterns in behavioral attribution by race and parental incarceration. As shown, teachers are more likely to attribute problem behavior to both internal and external factors if the student depicted is non-white and has an incarcerated father. In particular, the misbehavior of Latinx students with incarcerated fathers was seen as originating from inherent personality traits and neighborhood context, and the misbehavior of black students with incarcerated fathers was seen as originating from low intelligence and chaos at home. While theory would suggest that internal and external attributions would operate in opposing directions, these data reveal that race and parental incarceration increase the likelihood of external as well as internal attributions.

*Table 9: Attributional response by father's incarceration and race*

	Father Incarcerated			Father not incarcerated		
	White	Black	Latinx	White	Black	Latinx
Troublemaker	1.67	1.69	1.77	1.45	1.59	1.50
No self-control	2.54	2.41	2.74	2.47	2.56	2.37
Low intelligence	1.39	1.64	1.56	1.33	1.43	1.40
Internal scale	1.86	1.90	2.03	1.75	1.85	1.76
Rough neighborhood	2.06	2.20	2.37	1.67	1.83	1.74
Large class size	1.99	2.05	2.24	1.90	2.22	1.96
Chaos at home	3.68	3.78	3.61	3.21	3.15	3.05

Note: cell values are the overall mean on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “not at all likely” and 5 being “extremely likely.” Cells are shaded light to dark based on value within each row

### *Multilevel models predicting attributional response*

The association between parental incarceration and attributional response displayed in the three-way table above was confirmed through statistical estimation. Results of multilevel random intercept models for each external attribution and the internal attribution composite score are shown in Table 10. Within each attributional response, M1 represents the best-fitting model

Table 10: Behavioral attribution models

	Internal attribution score		Rough neighborhood		Large class size		Chaos at home		
	M1	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2	
intercept	1.805*** (.098)	1.862*** (.092)	1.814*** (.109)	1.766*** (.113)	1.878*** (.110)	1.856*** (.112)	3.405*** (.131)	3.317*** (.088)	
Vignette Characteristics	father incarcerated	.095*** (.028)	.098*** (.027)	.412*** (.043)	.412*** (.043)		.011 (.083)	.573*** (.055)	.585*** (.056)
	race (reference = white)								
	<i>black</i>		.013 (.033)		.079 (.051)		.110* (.046)		-.077 (.067)
	<i>latinx</i>		.041 (.034)		.061 (.052)		.042 (.047)		-.152* (.068)
	boy					.063† (.037)			-.345** (.131)
	behavior (reference = refuses task)							.000 (.075)	
	<i>snaps pencil</i>							.099 (.076)	
	<i>shoves peer</i>							.104 (.098)	
	<i>uses phone</i>							-.450*** (.098)	
Teacher Characteristics	race (reference = white)								
	<i>black</i>	.016 (.180)	.024 (.180)	.370† (.207)	.370† (.206)				
	<i>latinx</i>	.462** (.173)	.460** (.160)	.397* (.200)	.402* (.199)				
	<i>multiracial</i>	.010 (.273)	.099 (.272)	.118 (.312)	.131 (.312)				
	<i>Other</i>	.296 (.216)	.376† (.213)	.170 (.246)	.177 (.245)				
	man	.149† (.089)							
	years of experience								
	region (reference = northeast)								
	<i>midwest</i>	-.054 (.122)	-.077 (.121)	-.092 (.140)	-.092 (.140)				
<i>south</i>	-.204† (.115)	-.185 (.114)	-.328* (.133)	-.326* (.133)					
<i>west</i>	-.249† (.133)	-.250* (.126)	-.335* (.153)	-.337* (.152)					
School	% free/reduced lunch					.005** (.002)	.005* (.002)		
	% black					-.006* (.003)	-.006* (.003)		
	% latinx	.002 (.002)		.004† (.002)	.004† (.002)				
<b>AIC</b>	1484.6	1508.3	2194.3	2195.7	2089.9	2090.9	2782.8	2807.0	
<b>BIC</b>	1548.5	1572.5	2253.1	2264.3	2119.3	2130.0	2832.1	2841.5	

Maximum likelihood estimations (standard error); †  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

based on BIC out of the top five models selected through Bayesian model averaging. M2 represents the best-fitting model that includes both parental incarceration and race. Parental incarceration was found to be a statistically significant predictor in the best-fitting models estimating the attribution of behavior to internal characteristics, rough neighborhood, and chaos at home (but not class size). Interestingly, student race was not present in any of the best-fitting models. While theory suggests that students of color are seen as more culpable than their white peers (thus misbehavior should be seen as originating from internal characteristics), this association is not supported by the factorial survey data. When included as a predictor, there was some indication that the misbehavior of black students was more likely to be attributed to large class size when compared to white students, and the misbehavior of Latinx students was less likely to be attributed to chaos at home when compared to white students. However, the effect of student race does not improve the predictive power of the model when this variable is included.

### *Summary of teachers behavioral attribution*

Here, I tested the hypothesis that teachers are more likely to attribute problem behavior among children of incarcerated parents to internal rather than environmental characteristics due to stereotypical assumptions that “the apple doesn’t fall from the tree” (the transference of a parent’s stigma to their children). The findings indicate that there is not necessarily an internal-external attribution scale, wherein teachers’ stronger tendencies toward internal attributions are related to weaker tendencies toward external attributions. Rather, teachers might be generally more inclined to try and identify the root of the behavior when they know that a student’s father is incarcerated. The finding that parental incarceration influences the attribution of problem behavior to neighborhood characteristics and chaos at home but not class size could also indicate further assumptions teachers make about children of incarcerated parents. It is likely that these

two factors are more implicitly linked to parental incarceration than other factors commonly included in external attribution scales (for example, poor school organization and management, teacher's personality/teaching style, rejection by peers, excessive demands in classroom, parenting style, parent's low income). Limitations on the length of my survey prohibited me from including a more comprehensive list of behavioral attributions, but the results of this analysis suggest this could be an interesting area for future research.

## Parental incarceration and classroom discipline

The analysis above revealed that paternal incarceration can affect the way that classroom misbehavior is interpreted by teachers. Specifically, teachers are more likely to attribute misbehavior to internal characteristics, neighborhood context, or chaos at home if a child's father is incarcerated. Here, I examine whether these attributions translate to differences in response to misbehavior for children with incarcerated fathers.

Teachers completing the factorial survey were asked to report their likelihood of utilizing a range of common classroom discipline strategies: ignoring the behavior, keeping the student in during lunch/recess, sending the student out into the hall or to a break room, referring the student to the principal's office, or calling for the assistance of the police or a school resource officer. While calling the police/school resource officer is a less common response and varies widely by school context, it is included to represent the highly punitive school discipline strategies increasingly used, particularly in inner-city schools. Ignoring the behavior is included to represent the opposite end of the spectrum. I am most interested in disciplinary practices that increase the chances of suspension/expulsion or criminal justice contact, since these strategies have been shown to influence long-term educational outcomes (Gregory et al. 2010; Perry and

Morris 2014). I am also interested in the choice to remove misbehaving students from the classroom, because excluding students from the learning environment, even for short periods of time, could influence their academic engagement and educational outcomes. Therefore, my primary outcomes of interest include teacher’s self-reported propensity to send the student out into the hall, refer the student to the principal’s office, and call the police. In the following analyses, each disciplinary response is examined separately<sup>14</sup>.

Table 11 displays patterns in teacher’s self-reported anticipated response to student misbehavior by race and paternal incarceration. As shown here, teachers’ self-reported likelihood of utilizing all disciplinary responses aside from sending a student to the principal’s office are lowest for white students without a parent incarcerated. Interestingly, ignoring the behavior does not have noticeably different response patterns than the active disciplinary responses. Among students with an incarcerated parent, teachers reported that they were most likely to send the student out of the classroom, to the principal’s office, or call the police or school resource officer if the student was black or Latinx.

*Table 11: Disciplinary response by father's incarceration and race*

	<b>Father Incarcerated</b>			<b>Father not incarcerated</b>		
	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Latinx</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Latinx</i>
Ignore behavior	1.29	1.30	1.46	1.28	1.33	1.36
Keep student in	2.28	2.11	2.15	2.07	2.16	2.26
Break room/hall	2.46	2.48	2.60	2.28	2.51	2.41
Principal’s office	1.79	2.01	1.90	1.92	1.89	1.78
Police or SRO	1.13	1.20	1.22	1.10	1.19	1.14

Note: cell values are the overall mean on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “not at all likely” and 5 being “extremely likely.” Cells are shaded light to dark based on value within each row

<sup>14</sup>A confirmatory factor analyses did not reveal any dependencies between the response choices.

### *Multilevel models predicting disciplinary response*

While the three-way table suggests patterns in disciplinary response by race and paternal incarceration, statistical analyses reveal that these variables are not strong predictors of disciplinary response. In the sections to follow, multilevel random intercept models are estimated for each disciplinary response. Models including vignette, teacher, and school characteristics show that factors such as the type of misbehavior, teacher gender, geographical region, school percent free/reduced lunch, and school percent black have a greater impact on decisions about discipline than paternal incarceration or race.

#### *Disciplinary response: ignore behavior*

In an initial exploratory analysis, I estimated a range of models predicting teacher's self-reported likelihood of responding to classroom misbehavior by ignoring it. These models consisted of a range of covariates that were of interest theoretically and/or empirically. Table 12 displays a selection of the best performing models in terms of balancing fit and parsimony, as measured by the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC). Model 1 is the best-fitting model found in my exploration of the data. This model includes student behavior as the only vignette-level predictor, with behavior, region of residence, and attribution of behavior to large class size driving most of the variation in choice to ignore misbehavior. In this model, type of student behavior is the best predictor of teachers' self-reported propensity to ignore the behavior. Teachers generally reported that they were very unlikely to ignore any misbehavior, but they were less likely to ignore the misbehavior if the student had acted aggressively toward another student or destroyed another student's property. Teachers were more likely to ignore a student using their cell phone or refusing to complete their assigned work. Teachers were also more likely to ignore misbehavior if they attributed it to large class size.

Table 12: Ignore behavior models

	<b>Ignore Model 1</b>	<b>Ignore Model 2</b>	<b>Ignore Model 3</b>
intercept	1.212*** (.107)	1.227*** (.108)	1.209*** (.110)
<b>Vignette Characteristics</b>			
father incarcerated		-.0416 (.037)	-.039 (.037)
race (reference = white)			.010 (.044)
<i>black</i>			.043 (.045)
<i>latinx</i>			
behavior (reference = refuses task)			
<i>snaps pencil</i>	-.231*** (.050)	-.232*** (.050)	-.232*** (.050)
<i>shoves student</i>	-.355*** (.051)	-.358*** (.051)	-.358*** (.051)
<i>knocks sculpture</i>	-.311*** (.065)	-.311*** (.065)	-.315*** (.065)
<i>uses phone</i>	0.010 (.065)	.004 (.065)	.003 (.065)
<b>Behavioral Attributions</b>			
large class size	.061* (.027)	.061* (.027)	.061* (.027)
<b>Teacher Characteristics</b>			
region (reference = northeast)			
<i>midwest</i>	.108 (.108)	.109 (.108)	.109 (.108)
<i>south</i>	.201† (.103)	.202† (.103)	.202† (.103)
<i>west</i>	.191† (.110)	.191† (.111)	.191† (.111)
<b>School Characteristics</b>			
% black	.002 (.002)	.002 (.002)	.002 (.002)
<b>Number of observations</b>	990	990	990
<b>Number of teachers</b>	199	199	199
<b>Log Likelihood</b>	-914.3	-913.6	-913.1
<b>AIC</b>	1852.6	1853.3	1856.3
<b>BIC</b>	1911.3	1917.0	1929.8

Maximum likelihood estimations (standard error); †  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

Model 2 is the best-fitting model containing paternal incarceration, the primary predictor of interest. In this model, student behavior remains the best predictor of teachers' self-reported propensity to ignore behavior. Paternal incarceration is negatively associated with the likelihood

to ignore behavior, but this effect is not statistically significant. Including student race in Model 3 does not improve the BIC, and like paternal incarceration, does not indicate an impact on propensity to ignore behavior. Finally, I examined the performance of the best model (Model 1) without accounting for the hierarchical structure of the data. Pooling all vignettes without including a random intercept for teachers resulted in a much worse model (BIC=2162.6 vs 1911.3), indicating that it is important to account for variation in teachers' baseline tendency toward ignoring misbehavior.

In sum, these results indicate that the best predictors of teachers' propensity to ignore behavior are the type of behavior, attributing the behavior to large class size, and region. Paternal incarceration was not found to have an impact on this disciplinary response.

*Disciplinary response: keep student in during lunch or recess*

Table 13 displays a selection of the best performing models for predicting teachers' propensity to keep a student in the classroom during lunch or recess as a response to misbehavior. As with teacher's self-reported likelihood of ignoring the behavior, an exploratory analysis was conducted to examine the effect of a range of covariates on self-reported likelihood of keeping students in, and I relied primarily on BIC to assess the performance of the models.

Model 1 is the best fitting model without including paternal incarceration, the primary outcome of interest. In this model, teachers' belief that rough neighborhood was a factor contributing to the misbehavior was the only statistically significant predictor of the propensity to keep a student in during lunch or recess, though the inclusion of teacher race and attribution of behavior to chaos at home also improved the predictive power of the model. In Model 2, the BIC is improved by including paternal incarceration and excluding teacher race. Paternal incarceration improves the model performance, but rough neighborhood remains the only

statistically significant predictor. As shown in Model 3, the BIC is not improved by including student race. In the best-fitting model including both paternal incarceration and student race, the rough neighborhood attribution remains the only statistically significant predictor.

Table 13: Keep student in models

	<b>Keep in Model 1</b>	<b>Keep in Model 2</b>	<b>Keep in Model 3</b>
intercept	1.964 <sup>***</sup> (.130)	1.981 <sup>***</sup> (.131)	1.924 <sup>***</sup> (.137)
<b>Vignette Characteristics</b>			
father incarcerated		-.053 (.046)	0.050 (.046)
race (reference = white)			
<i>black</i>			-.004 (.051)
<i>latinx</i>			.033 (.052)
<b>Behavioral Attributions</b>			
rough neighborhood	.100 <sup>**</sup> (.033)	.112 <sup>**</sup> (.034)	.109 <sup>**</sup> (.034)
chaos at home	.018 (.025)	.024 (.026)	.027 (.026)
<b>Teacher Characteristics</b>			
race (reference = white)			
<i>black</i>	.422 (.319)		.416 (.318)
<i>latinx</i>	.380 (.286)		.377 (.285)
<i>multiracial</i>	.627 (.483)		.630 (.482)
<i>other</i>	-.562 (.387)		-.560 (.386)
Man	-.261 (.162)	-.252 (.161)	-.263 (.161)
<b>Number of observations</b>	1014	1014	1014
<b>Number of teachers</b>	204	204	204
<b>Log Likelihood</b>	-1195.3	-1198.3	-1194.4
<b>AIC</b>	2410.6	2410.7	2414.7
<b>BIC</b>	2459.9	2445.1	2478.7

Maximum likelihood estimations (standard error); †  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

I also examined the performance of the best model (Model 2) without accounting for the hierarchical structure of the data. When all vignettes were pooled without accounting for teacher-level effects, all coefficients (for paternal incarceration, teacher gender, rough neighborhood, and

chaos at home) became statistically significant. However, the single-level structure resulted in a much worse model performance (BIC = 3267.1 vs 2445.1), indicating that it is important to account for variation in teachers' baseline tendency toward ignoring misbehavior.

The results of this analysis provide evidence that teacher's knowledge of a parent's incarceration is an important factor to include in predicting teachers' self-reported propensity to keep a student in during lunch/recess as a response to misbehavior. However, the effect of paternal incarceration is not significant in and of itself. The best predictor of whether a teacher is inclined to keep a student in is the degree to which they attribute the misbehavior to the student living in a rough neighborhood. While parental incarceration increases teachers' propensity to attribute misbehavior to neighborhood characteristics, the effect of parental incarceration on the decision to keep a student in remains non-significant even when all the behavioral attribution is left out of the model.

*Disciplinary response: send student to the hall/break room*

Table 14 displays the best-fitting models predicting teacher's self-reported propensity to respond to misbehavior by sending a student out into the hall or to a break room. Model 1 is the best-fitting model without parental incarceration. Here, the attribution of misbehavior to internal characteristics and chaos at home are the strongest predictors of the choice to remove a student from the learning environment. Teacher gender also has an effect on self-reported propensity to send a student out of the classroom, with men being less likely to respond in this manner. Teacher religiosity (as measured by frequency of church attendance) and school percent free or reduced lunch are also present in the best-fitting model, but the effects are not statistically significant.

Table 14: Remove from classroom models

	<b>Remove student Model 1</b>	<b>Remove student Model 2</b>	<b>Remove student Model 3</b>
Intercept	1.391*** (.235)	1.505*** (.185)	1.332*** (.240)
<b>Vignette Characteristics</b>			
father incarcerated		-.041 (.054)	-.045 (.054)
race (reference = white)			
<i>black</i>			.110 <sup>†</sup> (.061)
<i>Latinx</i>			.001 (.062)
<b>Behavioral Attributions</b>			
internal scale	.265*** (.056)	.266*** (.056)	.268*** (.056)
chaos at home	.199*** (.028)	.206*** (.029)	.206*** (.030)
<b>Teacher Characteristics</b>			
man	-.374* (.146)	-.353* (.147)	-.363* (.146)
church going (reference = never)			
<i>once a year or less</i>	.146 (.232)		.156 (.232)
<i>a few times a year</i>	.278 (.237)		.283 (.237)
<i>once or twice a month</i>	.468 <sup>†</sup> (.262)		.469 <sup>†</sup> (.262)
<i>once a week</i>	.194 (.205)		.198 (.205)
<i>more than once/week</i>	-.313 (.280)		-.306 (.280)
<b>School Characteristics</b>			
% free or reduced lunch	-.003 (.002)	-.003 (.002)	-.003 (.002)
<b>Number of observations</b>	1003	1003	1003
<b>Number of teachers</b>	202	202	202
<b>Log Likelihood</b>	-1305.0	-1308.8	-1302.6
<b>AIC</b>	2634.1	2633.5	2635.1
<b>BIC</b>	2693.0	2672.8	2708.8

Maximum likelihood estimations (standard error); <sup>†</sup>  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

Model 2 represents the best-fitting model that includes parental incarceration. In this model, parental incarceration does not have a statistically significant effect on choice to remove a student from the classroom, but the model including parental incarceration performs better than

the model without parental incarceration, suggesting that it is an important factor to account for. Model 3 is the best-fitting model that includes the effect of student race. Though student race is shown to be marginally statistically significant in this model, with teacher being more likely to report they would send black students out into the hall, including this variable does not improve the performance of the model. The model with the best balance between fit and complexity (Model 2) also performed better when estimated using a multi-level structure accounting for teacher-level error than when all vignettes were pooled (BIC = 2672.8 vs 3189.9).

In summary, examination of the impacts of various student, teacher, and school-level characteristics on teachers' self-reported propensity to send students out in to the hall or to a breakroom in response to misbehavior reveals that teachers are more likely to respond in this manner if they are female, if they view the behavior as originating from a student's inherent traits, or if they view the behavior as originating from chaos at home. While parental incarceration does not have a strong direct effect on teacher's choice to remove a misbehaving student from the classroom, inclusion of this variable improves the predictive performance of the model. Previous analyses revealed that parental incarceration affects the attribution of blame to both internal characteristics and chaos at home, but removing these attributional responses from the model does not make the effect of parental incarceration statistically significant.

*Disciplinary response: refer student to the principal's office*

Referring a student to the principal's office is the first step toward suspension or expulsion, practices that have been shown impact long-term academic outcomes and disproportionately impact students of color. Teachers play an important role as gatekeepers in this system. As with race, any bias exhibited towards children of incarcerated parents in the

decision to refer students to the principal's office could contribute to educational detainment due to the association between discipline and achievement.

Table 15: Refer student to the principal's office models

	Principal's office Model 1	Principal's office Model 2	Principal's office Model 3
intercept	.6811*** (.163)	.661*** (.164)	.670*** (.168)
<b>Vignette Characteristics</b>			
father incarcerated		-.065 (.059)	-.069 (.059)
race (reference = white)			
<i>black</i>			-.006 (.067)
<i>latinx</i>			-.074 (.068)
<b>Behavioral Attributions</b>			
internal scale	.572*** (.056)	.576*** (.057)	.579*** (.057)
chaos at home	.093** (.029)	.104*** (.307)	.101** (.031)
<b>School Characteristics</b>			
% free or reduced lunch	-.003* (.002)	-.003* (.002)	-.003* (.002)
<b>Number of observations</b>	1002	1002	1002
<b>Number of teachers</b>	201	201	201
<b>Log Likelihood</b>	-1348.6	-1348.0	-1347.3
<b>AIC</b>	2709.2	2710.0	2712.5
<b>BIC</b>	2738.7	2744.4	2756.7

Maximum likelihood estimations (standard error); †  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

Models examining the factors associated with the use of referrals as a response to classroom misbehavior are displayed in Table 15. As shown in Model 1, teacher attributions of misbehavior to internal characteristics and chaos at home had the strongest impact on teacher's self-reported propensity to refer students to the principal's office. The model was not improved by including father's incarceration (Model 2) or race (Model 3). This indicates that parental incarceration does not have an effect on this disciplinary response. The model also performed best when estimated using a hierarchical rather than a pooled structure (BIC = 2738.7 vs 2991.7).

*Disciplinary response: call the police or school resource officer*

Teachers reported a very low average likelihood of responding to classroom misbehavior by calling the police or school resource officer. As displayed in Table 16: Model 1, the small amount of variation in this response is best explained by attribution of the misbehavior to internal characteristics and teacher gender. Teachers who are men and teachers who see the behavior as originating from students' innate characteristics reported and increased likelihood of calling the police/SRO in response to problem behavior.

Table 16: Call the police/SRO models

	<b>Police/SRO Model 1</b>	<b>Police/SRO Model 2</b>	<b>Police/SRO Model 3</b>
intercept	.774*** (.056)	.774*** (.056)	.753*** (.058)
<b>Vignette Characteristics</b>			
father incarcerated		-.002 (.022)	-.004 (.022)
race (reference = white)			
<i>black</i>			.049 <sup>†</sup> (.026)
<i>latinx</i>			.011 (.027)
<b>Behavioral Attributions</b>			
internal scale	.177*** (.024)	.177*** (.024)	.177*** (.024)
<b>Teacher Characteristics</b>			
Man	.180** (.063)	.179** (.063)	.184** (.063)
<b>Number of observations</b>	1021	1021	1021
<b>Number of teachers</b>	205	205	205
<b>Log Likelihood</b>	-486.8	-486.8	-484.9
<b>AIC</b>	983.6	985.6	985.8
<b>BIC</b>	1008.3	1015.2	1025.2

Maximum likelihood estimations (standard error); <sup>†</sup>  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

The inclusion of paternal incarceration (Model 2) and student race (Model 3) in the estimation of teacher's propensity to call the police/SRO did not improve the performance of the model. According to the BIC, student race is not useful in predicting teachers' reliance on police/SRO as a disciplinary response. However, when included in the model, race does have a marginally significant effect – teachers are somewhat more likely to report they would call the police/SRO if a student was black as opposed to white.

### *Summary of teachers' disciplinary response*

Multilevel random intercept models examining the impact of student, teacher, and school characteristics on teachers' decisions about discipline did not reveal a direct effect of paternal incarceration on school discipline. The inclusion of paternal incarceration in the models predicting teachers' self-reported propensity to keep a student in during lunch/recess or remove a student from the classroom did help improve the performance of the models, but the effect was not statistically significant in and of itself. In the models predicting teacher's self-reported likelihood of ignoring student behavior, type of behavior had the strongest effect—students displaying more aggressive behavior were less likely to be ignored. The other vignette dimensions, student race and gender, were not associated with teachers' disciplinary decisions.

### Discussion

The findings presented in this chapter provide partial support for my hypothesis that the stigma of parental incarceration impacts teachers' response to classroom misbehavior. In responding to vignettes describing a student's misbehavior in the classroom, teachers were more likely to attribute the behavior to internal characteristics (lack of self-control, being a troublemaker, and low intelligence), chaos at home, or rough neighborhood context if the student depicted had a father in prison. This indicates that parental incarceration has an impact on the implicit assumptions teachers make about a students' behavior, providing empirical support for prior claims made in the literature that children experience courtesy stigma as a result of their parent's incarceration.

Findings regarding the association between parental incarceration and the application of classroom discipline are less clear. In the models predicting teachers' propensity to use exclusionary/punitive discipline strategies (removing student from the classroom, referral to the

principal's office, and calling the police/SRO), teacher's attribution of the misbehavior to internal characteristics had a strong effect. Teachers reported a higher likelihood of sending the student out of the classroom, to the principal, or calling the police/SRO if they perceived a behavior as originating from internal student characteristics (lack of self-control, low-intelligence, and being a troublemaker). The attribution of misbehavior to chaos at home also contributed to a higher propensity to send the student out into the hall/break room and to the principal's office. While parental incarceration was shown to affect behavioral attributions made by teachers, this analysis did not reveal a direct or indirect association between parental incarceration and the application of discipline. In addition to models revealing an effect of behavioral attribution on disciplinary response, models were estimated that included only parental incarceration and not behavioral attributions – these models also failed to produce significant effects of parental incarceration on discipline.<sup>15</sup>

Additional models including interactions between race and behavior were also estimated to test the final hypothesis, that the effect of parental incarceration on teacher responses to problem behavior will be particularly pronounced for black males displaying stereotype-congruent behavior. No interaction effects were detected in these analyses. A further examination of the effect of parental incarceration by race, gender, and behavior type was conducted by re-running the best-performing model for each disciplinary response with the inclusion of student name (and exclusion of race, where applicable) and behavior type. Appendix D includes visualizations of the predicted teacher responses for each student name by behavior type. In these figures, there are not any discernable differences between children with and without incarcerated fathers. Patterns in disciplinary response based on race and gender (signaled

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<sup>15</sup> These models are not included here, but are available upon request.

by name) also tend to be relatively uniform. The largest apparent variation (though not statistically significant) is in teacher's likelihood of sending students out of the classroom if they knock a sculpture off a peer's desk – under this condition, teachers were most inclined to send Jamal, Alejandra, and Jorge into the hall/break room. Teachers also reported a higher likelihood of sending Tynisha out of the classroom for using her cell phone.

In sum, these analyses did not provide support for the hypotheses that parental incarceration impacts classroom discipline, or that the effect of parental incarceration on discipline is strongest for black boys displaying stereotype-congruent behavior. However, there is support for the hypothesis that teacher perceptions of the cause of classroom misbehavior are affected by parental incarceration. These findings paint a complex picture of the role that teacher bias might play in the educational experience of children of incarcerated parents. While parental incarceration is not shown to affect discipline, educational research shows that teacher perceptions can play a big role in shaping the educational trajectory of students (Clark 1997; Dallaire et al. 2010; Jencks and Phillips 1998; Oakes 2005). It could be that the perceptions of children of incarcerated parents revealed here are associated more directly with academic expectations and school tracking than with disciplinary decisions (Dallaire et al. 2010; Turney and Haskins 2014). It is also likely that the current analyses are missing an additional mediating variable with countervailing effects (MacKinnon 2008). For instance, the lowered expectations of behavior for children of incarcerated parents revealed by Wildeman et al. (2017) or the pity associated with parental incarceration revealed in my qualitative findings could decrease teachers' propensity to utilize exclusionary or punitive discipline, offsetting the effect of parental incarceration on discipline mediated by behavioral attribution. Future research should focus on

unpacking the association between judgements made about children of incarcerated parents and educational outcomes.

## Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusions

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### The experience of stigma

My research on stigma from the perspective of children of incarcerated parents and teachers provides unique insight into the ways this stigma operates. Through in-depth qualitative interviews and focus groups with children of incarcerated parents, I was able to examine variation in the way stigmatization is experienced between individuals and within the same individual across different contexts. These conversations also shed light on how the experience of stigma shapes the way individuals respond to the incarceration of their parent. Findings revealed that stigma is relatively ubiquitous – most respondents viewed their parent’s incarceration as a source of shame or embarrassment at one time or another. What differed was the degree and nature of this stigmatization. Some respondents never felt that they were viewed or treated differently because of their parent’s incarceration; others felt that their parent’s incarceration led to unfair judgements on the part of teachers, peers, and family members. For some, stigmatization impacted their own self-perception or sense of belonging among their peers. Of those who did feel stigmatized, many found that opening up about their parent’s incarceration was a source of relief and/or empowerment.

This dissertation also contributes to ongoing debates in the literature regarding the racialized impacts of parental incarceration. As noted by Haskins and Lee (2016), racial inequity should be central to any examination of the consequences of mass incarceration for families, whether or not its effect is found to be “significant” in statistical analyses. Decades of research on mass incarceration have revealed pervasive racial disparities in criminal justice contact, processing, and consequences. Where racial patterns are not found in outcomes of interest, these authors call for a more nuanced examination of why this is this case. We should be asking

ourselves why our models aren't showing an effect of race if we know that race matters, rather than dismissing race as unimportant. The current analysis contributes to this discussion by suggesting that race does play a role in experiences of stigmatization, regardless of its impact on judgements made about children of incarcerated parents.

The incarceration of a parent occurs within larger structures of social inequality that shape the way stigma is experienced. Interviews with young adults who had experienced parental incarceration revealed that stigma was experienced differently for white and non-white individuals. Most white respondents reported that although they were aware of the stigma associated with parental incarceration, they personally did not feel stigmatized. It may be the case that white respondents were less apt to report feeling stigmatized because they did not have a great deal of exposure to incarceration within their surrounding communities, and thus could more easily differentiate themselves from their incarcerated parent. This is concordant with Goffman's research suggesting that in many contexts, "the more allied the individual is with normals, the more he will see himself in non-stigmatic terms" (Goffman 1963:107).

However, not all white respondents were immune to stigmatization. Trisha explained that, precisely because of the structural forces that gave rise to mass incarceration and resulted in the overrepresentation of black folks within the criminal justice system, the incarceration of her parents was seen as even worse: "people don't expect, I guess, white people to mess up, or whatever it is. But then it's like, when they do, it's like the biggest deal in the world. And it's like, 'oh, they're such horrible people.'" Trisha's reflections corroborate previous findings that the magnitude of the effect of parental incarceration on white children could be greater, in part because it isn't expected in the same way it is for black children (Arditti 2012, 2015). While the magnitude of the effect may be greater for white children, parental incarceration is more

pervasive in black communities. The experience of black and white children of incarcerated parents within the context of the highly racialized system of mass incarceration highlights the importance of acknowledging the interplay between structural inequalities and micro-level social psychological processes (Hollander and Howard 2000).

## Perceptions of children with parents in prison

A common theme in my interviews with children of incarcerated parents was the notion that they were viewed by teachers as less capable or more prone to bad behavior than their peers. A factorial survey confirmed that paternal incarceration contributes to teachers' perceptions that a student's classroom misbehavior stems from internal characteristics (lack of self-control, low intelligence, and/or being a "troublemaker"). The association between paternal incarceration and behavioral attributions gives credence to interview respondents' perceptions of stigmatization.

While it was theorized that an increased attribution of behavior to internal characteristics would be accompanied by a decreased attribution of behavior to external characteristics, my findings revealed that teachers were also more likely to attribute misbehavior to a student's living environment (rough neighborhood and chaotic household) if their father was incarcerated. Research frequently frames the assumed locus of control as a scale from internal to external, but the co-occurrence of internal and external attributions of behavior supports findings that people do not necessarily "discount a cause of a behavior when other plausible causes are present" (McClure 1998). It may be that students with non-incarcerated parents are considered the baseline and no special attention is paid to their behavior, whereas teachers are more inclined to pathologize/make assumptions about the root of behavior when a student has a parent incarcerated. Unpacking the intricacies of teacher perceptions of children of incarcerated parents

is fertile ground for future research. Constraints on the length of the factorial survey analyzed here prevented me from examining a wide range of behavioral attributions – more research on the breadth of assumptions made about children of incarcerated parents is necessary for better understanding of how stigma operates from the perceiver’s perspective.

Further analysis revealed that behavioral attributions contributed to variation in disciplinary response. Teachers’ likelihood of utilizing an exclusionary/punitive disciplinary response increased with the attribution of misbehavior to internal characteristics or chaotic home life. However, this analysis did not reveal any effect (direct or indirect) of parental incarceration on disciplinary response. Prior research has shown that teachers expect children of incarcerated parents to have lower academic performance and worse behavior than their peers (Dallaire et al. 2010; Wildeman et al. 2017), and that teacher expectations can translate to an increased likelihood of grade retention (Turney and Haskins 2014). The findings presented in this dissertation indicate that teacher expectations/attributions of behavior might not translate to differences in disciplinary response for children of incarcerated parents in the same way that expectations of academic performance translate to academic interventions. However, further research is needed to overcome limitations of the current study. For instance, this study relies on teacher’s self-reported propensity to utilize various disciplinary responses. It could be that actual behavior is different than self-reported expectations of behavior. Research examining the effect of parental incarceration on the likelihood of suspension/expulsion could be particularly useful for helping to explain the educational detainment of children of incarcerated parents, given the association between exclusionary discipline and educational outcomes (Gregory et al. 2010).

## Stigma and the educational detainment of children of incarcerated parents

The overall aim of this dissertation was to examine stigma as a mechanism contributing to the educational detainment of children of incarcerated parents. While the question was relatively straightforward, the results provide a complex and varied answer. From the perspective of youth and young adults who had experienced parental incarceration, it was frequently a lonely/isolating experience. For some, this contributed to social withdrawal and disengagement from school. In this way, the psychological impacts of stigmatization contributed to educational detainment. However, it was difficult to disentangle the effects of the stigma of parental incarceration from the effects of other stigmatized identities. For many, it was the intersection of two or more stigmatizing markers that created social distance between these respondents and their peers. Those respondents who struggled in school also described a host of other factors that played a role, including: mental impairment, childhood illness, housing instability, and caretaking responsibilities.

Other respondents saw the path their parents had taken as a prime example of how not to live their lives, and worked hard to succeed in school to prove to themselves and others that they weren't like their parents. Actively resisting the stigma of parental incarceration with the support of friends, peers in Project WHAT!, caregivers, and other trusted adults was important for the academic success of several respondents. Among the respondents who said they did well in school, most attributed it to the support and stability provided by their remaining caregiver, desire to be a positive role model for their younger siblings, and the understanding that a good education is the foundation for future success.

Quantitative findings regarding the impact of parental incarceration on teachers' response to classroom misbehavior are also complex. While parental incarceration does affect teachers'

perceptions of the cause of misbehavior, there is no indication that this translates to differential treatment. These findings suggest that associative stigma does not contribute to harsher punishment for children of incarcerated parents, so it is unlikely that assumptions that “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” contribute to worse educational outcomes. However, as revealed in my qualitative findings and prior research, the stigma of parental incarceration can take different forms. In addition to feeling that they would be seen as more prone to bad behavior than their peers, some respondents felt that they were viewed as less capable than their peers and held to lower standards. This dimension of stigma has been shown to affect academic outcomes (Dallaire et al. 2010; Turney and Haskins 2014).

## Implications and policy recommendations

### *Should teachers know about a parent’s incarceration?*

The findings presented here raise interesting issues regarding the complexity of decisions to disclose this information in an educational setting. Interview respondents often felt that they were treated differently than their peers as a result of their parent’s incarceration. In many cases, this differential treatment took the form of lowered expectations. For example, Naliah said that she did pretty well in school when she was young, despite everything that was going on in her personal life. She attributes this, in part, to teachers “taking it easy on her.” She said that her academic achievement began to go downhill in ninth grade when she went to a new school where people didn’t necessarily know as much about her story. She said that, because teachers didn’t know what was going on with her, they treated her on equal footing with everyone else and school started to get a lot harder. In this way, the teachers who lowered expectations when she was young set her up to fall behind later on.

Teachers I consulted when creating the factorial survey explained that information about a parent's incarceration usually only came up in the context of discussions about behavior issues or other struggles students were having in the classroom. This also came through in interviews – Jasmine and Julie both said that teachers didn't ever ask about what was going on with them at home because they did pretty well in school and didn't have behavior problems. My quantitative findings suggest that providing information about a parent's incarceration could add fuel to the fire in a situation where a student is exhibiting problem behavior. These findings revealed that teachers' perceptions of student misbehavior are impacted by knowledge that their parent is incarcerated.

Despite indications that knowledge of a parents incarceration may lead to differential treatment, several interview respondents discussed situations in which teachers or other trusted adults at school provided much-needed support based on knowledge about the struggles they faced in their home life. Respondents told stories of teachers/principals who went above and beyond to visit them at home, give them a shoulder to cry on, and connect them with resources. Respondents also told stories of teachers who deliberately worked to increase visibility of parental incarceration and create a space where people could feel that they weren't alone. While opening up about parental incarceration and working to combat the social stigma was generally viewed in a positive light by Project WHAT! participants, Shantell sometimes felt uneasy about the comfort with which people talked about their family members being incarcerated because she worried that making incarceration seem normal thing made it less of a deterrent. Shantell felt that incarceration (though not necessarily parental incarceration) is something that *should* be stigmatized in order for it to stop being a normal life event for people in her community.

It is hard to say how things would have been different for Naliah when she was young if

teachers hadn't been aware of the challenges she faced in her home life, or what the benefits/drawbacks are to creating an atmosphere of openness regarding parental incarceration. At the least, the findings here reveal that increased training for teachers on how to support children of incarcerated parents could be useful for combatting feelings of stigmatization.

### *The power of storytelling*

The experience of respondents involved in Project WHAT! provides a strong case for the creation of more programs like it. PW youth said that they found a sense of belonging and solidarity with other youth in the group that they hadn't experienced before joining it. Having a space to share their own story with other children of incarcerated parents was an important tool for combatting the social isolation resulting from parental incarceration discussed throughout the literature and revealed in this dissertation. This program helped youth feel that they were not alone in their experience. In addition to disseminating the Project WHAT! model more widely, smaller-scale educational programs and/or support groups for children of incarcerated parents could provide relief from the social isolation they often experience.

Project WHAT! participants were also empowered by their participation in the program and felt that their voices were being heard. Youth in the program had spoken publicly about their experiences with parental incarceration to a wide variety of audiences, including teachers, social workers, police, incarcerated populations, youth groups, college classes, and legislators. Speaking from their own personal experiences with incarceration, and using knowledge about mass incarceration learned through participation in the program, these youth feel that they are really making a difference in the way that children of incarcerated parents were treated. They also felt that by broadening knowledge about the experience of parental incarceration they were

in a position to contribute to changing cultural narratives about what it means to be the child of an incarcerated parent.

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## Appendix A: Children of Incarcerated Parents Bill of Rights

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1. I have the right to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest.
2. I have the right to be heard when decisions are made about me.
3. I have the right to be considered when decisions are made about my parent.
4. I have the right to be well cared for in my parent's absence.
5. I have the right to speak with, see and touch my parent.
6. I have the right to support as I face my parent's incarceration.
7. I have the right not to be judged, blamed, or labeled because my parent is incarcerated.
8. I have the right to a lifelong relationship with my parent.

San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership: <http://www.sfcipp.org>

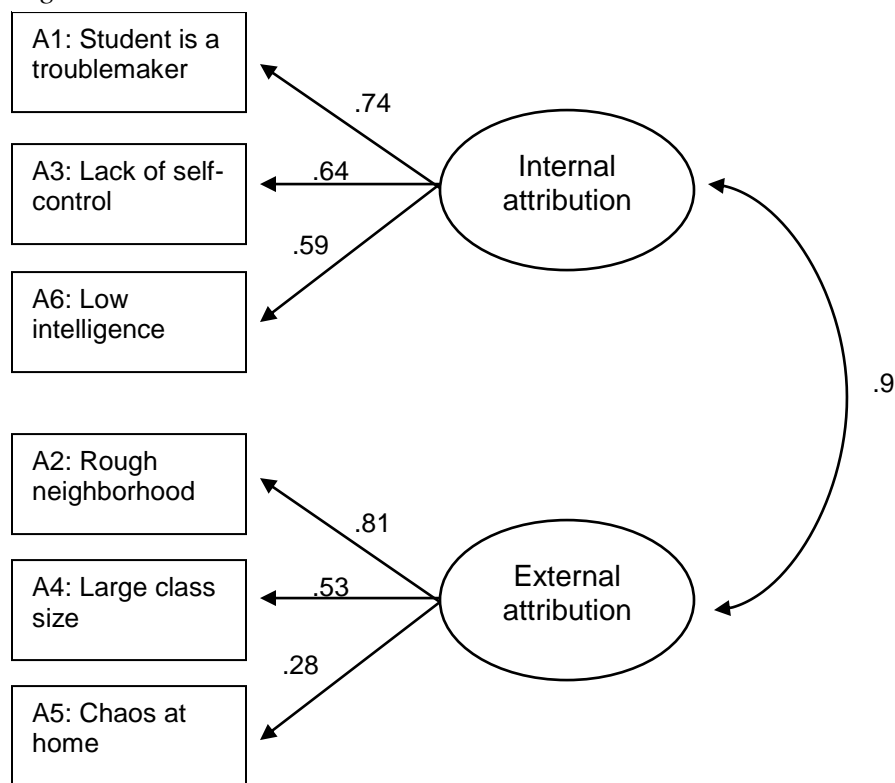
## Appendix B: Factor Analysis

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In order to examine the reliability/internal consistency of internal and external attribution scales, scores for each scale were assigned in R using the function `scoreItems` in the `{psych}` package (Revelle 2017). These scores are the average of the three components of each scale; the internal score is the average of troublemaker, lack of self-control, and low intelligence, and the external score is the average of rough neighborhood, large class size, and chaos at home. The `scoreItems` function also produces several tests of reliability, including Chronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ), Guttman's Lambda 6 (G6). For the internal scale,  $\alpha=0.68$  and  $G6=0.65$ ; and for the external scale,  $\alpha=0.52$  and  $G6=0.49$ . This indicates that the internal scale is relatively internally consistent, whereas the external scale is not.

A confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) was also conducted to estimate the behavioral attribution measurement model. The CFA was estimated in R using diagonally weighted least squared with robust standard errors and a mean and variance adjusted test statistic (WLSMV) (Rosseel 2012). This method is specifically designed for ordinal data and makes no distributional assumptions about the observed variables (Li 2016). Therefore, it is an appropriate method of estimation for the highly-skewed attitudinal response variables. Missing data were listwise deleted. As shown in the measurement model displayed in Figure 2, measures of internal attribution are more highly correlated with the latent construct than are measures of external attribution. This provides further evidence that the internal scale is valid whereas the external scale is not.

Figure 2: Behavioral attribution measurement model



\*All parameters significant at  $p < .000$ . Comparative fit index = .93; Tucker-Lewis index = .86; root mean square error of approximation = .09; standardized root mean square residual = .04; chi-square = 74.73; degrees of freedom = 8.

## Appendix C: Ordered Probit Models

Table 17: Ordered probit models: ignore behavior

	Ignore Model 1	Ignore Model 2	Ignore Model 3
<b>Vignette Characteristics</b>			
father incarcerated		-.200 (.126)	-.204 (.127)
race (reference = white)			
<i>black</i>			.178 (.153)
<i>Latinx</i>			.172 (.153)
behavior (reference = snaps pencil)			
<i>shoves student</i>	-.526** (.191)	-.548** (.192)	-.551** (.193)
<i>refuses task</i>	.654*** (.161)	.658*** (.161)	.672*** (.162)
<i>knocks sculpture</i>	-.517† (.278)	-.527† (.280)	-.529† (.281)
<i>uses phone</i>	.704*** (.202)	.677*** (.203)	.687*** (.204)
<b>Behavioral Attributions</b>			
large class size	.115 (.088)	.120 (.089)	.116 (.089)
<b>Teacher Characteristics</b>			
region (reference = northeast)			
<i>midwest</i>	.140 (.373)	.147 (.378)	.147 (.380)
<i>south</i>	.367 (.350)	.372 (.354)	.375 (.356)
<i>West</i>	.477 (.376)	.479 (.380)	.475 (.382)
<b>School Characteristics</b>			
% black	.008 (.005)	.008 (.005)	.008 (.005)
<b>Threshold coefficients</b>			
not at all likely   slightly likely	2.282 (.384)	2.235 (.388)	2.360 (.403)
slightly likely   moderately likely	3.239 (.399)	3.199 (.403)	3.328 (.418)
moderately likely   very likely	4.223 (.420)	4.187 (.424)	4.319 (.439)
very likely   extremely likely	5.202 (.473)	5.165 (.477)	5.295 (.490)
<b>Number of observations</b>	990	990	990
<b>Number of teachers</b>	199	199	199
<b>Log Likelihood</b>	-554.75	-553.48	-552.63
<b>AIC</b>	1137.51	1136.97	1139.27
<b>BIC</b>	1206.075	1210.434	1222.527

Maximum likelihood estimations (standard error); †  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

Table 18: Ordered probit models: keep student in

	<b>Keep in Model 1</b>	<b>Keep in Model 2</b>	<b>Keep in Model 3</b>
<b>Vignette Characteristics</b>			
father incarcerated		-.107 (.100)	-.100 (.101)
race (reference = white)			
<i>black</i>			-.004 (.112)
<i>Latinx</i>			.084 (.114)
<b>Behavioral Attributions</b>			
rough neighborhood	.183** (.070)	.206** (.072)	.201** (.072)
chaos at home	.041 (.054)	.055 (.056)	.061 (.056)
<b>Teacher Characteristics</b>			
race (reference = white)			
<i>black</i>	.763 (.690)		.750 (.689)
<i>latinx</i>	.594 (.620)		.591 (.619)
<i>multiracial</i>	1.158 (1.038)		1.168 (1.036)
<i>other</i>	-1.387 (.909)		-1.378 (.906)
Male	-.613 <sup>†</sup> (.357)	-.612 <sup>†</sup> (.356)	-.616 <sup>†</sup> (.356)
<b>Threshold coefficients</b>			
not at all likely   slightly likely	-.051 (.287)	-.058 (.287)	.042 (.302)
slightly likely   moderately likely	1.239 (.291)	1.232 (.291)	1.334 (.306)
moderately likely   very likely	2.587 (.299)	2.581 (.299)	2.684 (.314)
very likely   extremely likely	4.544 (.330)	4.539 (.329)	4.638 (.344)
<b>Number of observations</b>	1014	1014	1014
<b>Number of teachers</b>	204	204	204
<b>Log Likelihood</b>	-1014.88	-1017.26	-1013.93
<b>AIC</b>	2053.76	2052.51	2057.87
<b>BIC</b>	2112.82	2096.81	2131.69

Maximum likelihood estimations (standard error); <sup>†</sup>  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

Table 19: Ordered probit models: remove from class

	<b>Remove Model 1</b>	<b>Remove Model 2</b>	<b>Remove Model 3</b>
<b>Vignette Characteristics</b>			
father incarcerated		-.064 (.090)	-.069 (.090)
race (reference = white)			
<i>black</i>			.144 (.102)
<i>Latinx</i>			-.023 (.105)
<b>Behavioral Attributions</b>			
internal score	.432*** (.093)	.435*** (.093)	.437*** (.093)
chaos at home	.313*** (.048)	.326*** (.050)	.323*** (.051)
<b>Teacher Characteristics</b>			
male	-.736** (.261)	-.696** (.262)	-.724** (.262)
church going (reference = more than once a week)			
<i>once a week</i>	.920* (.459)		.981* (.460)
<i>once or twice a month</i>	1.359* (.542)		1.355* (.544)
<i>a few times a year</i>	1.037* (.503)		1.034* (.504)
<i>once a year or less</i>	.739 (.498)		.745 (.500)
<i>never</i>	.490 (.501)		.482 (.503)
<b>School Characteristics</b>			
% free or reduced lunch	-.006 (.004)	-.005 (.004)	-.006 (.004)
<b>Threshold coefficients</b>			
not at all likely   slightly likely	1.254 (.487)	.518 (.320)	1.314 (.492)
slightly likely   moderately likely	2.362 (.490)	1.628 (.322)	2.427 (.495)
moderately likely   very likely	3.611 (.498)	2.877 (.332)	3.681 (.503)
very likely   extremely likely	5.329 (.515)	4.594 (.353)	5.400 (.5203)
<b>Number of observations</b>	1003	1003	1003
<b>Number of teachers</b>	202	202	202
<b>Log Likelihood</b>	-1160.40	-1164.34	-1158.52
<b>AIC</b>	2348.81	2348.68	2351.04
<b>BIC</b>	2417.56	2397.79	2434.52

Maximum likelihood estimations (standard error); †  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

Table 20: Ordered probit models: refer student to the principal's office

	Principal Model 1	Principal Model 2	Principal Model 3
<b>Vignette Characteristics</b>			
father incarcerated		-.070 (.092)	-.077 (.093)
race (reference = white)			
<i>black</i>			-.005 (.107)
<i>latinx</i>			-.120 (.110)
<b>Behavioral Attributions</b>			
internal scale	.895*** (.094)	.900*** (.095)	.905*** (.095)
chaos at home	.153** (.048)	.156** (.051)	.163** (.051)
<b>School Characteristics</b>			
% free or reduced lunch	-.005 <sup>†</sup> (.003)	-.005 <sup>†</sup> (.003)	-.005 <sup>†</sup> (.003)
<b>Threshold coefficients</b>			
not at all likely   slightly likely	2.036 (.279)	2.059 (.282)	2.022 (.288)
slightly likely   moderately likely	3.047 (.290)	3.070 (.292)	3.035 (.299)
moderately likely   very likely	3.893 (.302)	3.918 (.304)	3.885 (.310)
very likely   extremely likely	4.795 (.319)	4.823 (.322)	4.791 (.327)
<b>Number of observations</b>	1002	1002	1002
<b>Number of teachers</b>	201	201	201
<b>Log Likelihood</b>	-1066.41	-1066.12	-1065.33
<b>AIC</b>	2148.83	2150.25	2152.66
<b>BIC</b>	2188.11	2194.44	2206.66

Maximum likelihood estimations (standard error); <sup>†</sup>  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

Table 21: Ordered probit models: call the police/SRO

	Police/SRO Model 1	Police/SRO Model 2	Police/SRO Model 3
<b>Vignette Characteristics</b>			
father incarcerated		.147 (.181)	.142 (.182)
race (reference = white)			
<i>black</i>			.378 <sup>†</sup> (.226)
<i>latinx</i>			.003 (.240)
<b>Behavioral Attributions</b>			
internal scale	1.241*** (.202)	1.246*** (.204)	1.253*** (.207)
<b>Teacher Characteristics</b>			
male	1.007* (.470)	1.024* (.471)	1.092* (.480)
<b>Threshold coefficients</b>			
not at all likely   slightly likely	5.987 (.763)	6.067 (.778)	6.273 (.809)
slightly likely   moderately likely	6.978 (.813)	7.061 (.828)	7.283 (.860)
moderately likely   very likely	8.423 (.897)	8.507 (.912)	8.719 (.941)
very likely   extremely likely	10.483 (1.130)	10.552 (1.138)	10.881 (1.204)
<b>Number of observations</b>	1021	1021	1021
<b>Number of teachers</b>	205	205	205
<b>Log Likelihood</b>	-273.10	-272.78	-270.75
<b>AIC</b>	560.21	561.55	561.51
<b>BIC</b>	594.71	600.98	610.79

Maximum likelihood estimations (standard error); <sup>†</sup>  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

## Appendix D: Parental incarceration and discipline by race, gender, and behavior type

The following plots explore the question: is the effect of parental incarceration on teacher responses to problem behavior particularly pronounced for black males displaying stereotype-congruent behavior? In these figures, students with non-incarcerated parents appear in the top plot (FALSE) and students with incarcerated parents appear in the plot below (TRUE). Predicted values of teacher's disciplinary responses are based on the best-performing multilevel models for each outcome. Teachers predicted likelihood of disciplinary response (y-axis) is on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "not at all likely" and 5 being "extremely likely". The scales of the y-axes have been adjusted to provide easier readability of the figures.

