It Motivated Me More Than It Crushed Me: 
Children of Incarcerated Parents 
in a Highly Selective University

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Abstract

With over 2.7 million American children living with a parent absent to jail or prison, the rampanty of parental incarceration has become an insidious epidemic that disproportionately affects impoverished Black and Hispanic youth. While minimal research has examined these children at the elementary and secondary education levels, there has been no research to date about their experiences in institutions of higher education. In order to address this void and explore how educational systems can better adapt to the circumstances of parental incarceration to facilitate student achievement, this study employed a semi-structured, qualitative research design to examine the perceptions of twelve students with histories of parental incarceration at a highly selective university. Results suggest that the majority of the participants 1. perceived their parents’ incarceration as the impetus for their educational performance; 2. demonstrated an independence that has led to social isolation within educational environments; and 3. used their experiences with parental incarceration and its symptomatic adversities to inform their social impact career aspirations. This study suggests that these students’ narratives and their successes should not be used as models for other children of the incarcerated to strive for. Rather, the analysis reveals what exactly was burdened by these participants in order for them to attain academic excellence and how those burdens can be structurally displaced onto educational institutions. Finally, to begin to rectify the intergenerational effects of parental incarceration, this study suggests that there must be a commitment to addressing the historical sentiment, pervasive in the bedrock of American democracy, that deems poor families of color unworthy of remaining a family unit.
Dedication

To the 2.7 million children who live with a parent absent to jail and prison, and to those millions more who have ever lived with a parent incarcerated; those whose parents live under the terms of probation or parole; and those whose parents have been institutionalized for criminal insanity.
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I learned at an early age that it takes a village to raise a child. This lesson was furthered in the year throughout which this project was completed as I learned that it takes a village to complete a senior honors thesis. As such, I owe my gratitude to the following people:

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Chapter One
Introduction

My father has been absent from my life for the past eight years. For the majority of that time, I rarely disclosed to my friends, mentors, or others why he was gone; in fact, I did not speak of him at all. I feared that they would judge my family, question our integrity, and think less of me and my own intelligence. So, along with all of the happy memories that I had with him, I suppressed the positive images of my father – his beaming smile, his bellowing laughter, his boundless love – from my memory, because when he was arrested, I made the tragic mistake of believing that his incarceration was reflective of a criminality that I could not bring myself to associate with.

For most of the eight years that my father has been gone, I denied how his incarceration has shaped who I am today. I refused to define myself or give anyone a reason to define me by his prolonged absence. However, in the spring of 2017, my studies brought me face to face with the reality of parental incarceration in the United States. That is, although the U.S. has only five percent of the world’s population, it houses 25 percent of the world’s prisoners (Walmsley, 2015). Of these 2.3 million people under the supervision of federal, state, and local correctional facilities, 1.2 million are parents. As a result, there are 2.7 million children – that is 3.6 percent or one in every 28 of our nation’s youth – living with a parent absent to incarceration. As I further investigated this reality, I realized that I am one of the many children of color upon which the burden of parental incarceration is disproportionately bore. Compared to 1.8 percent of their white counterparts, 3.5 percent of Hispanic children and 11.8 percent of Black children – one in every nine – live with a parent incarcerated (Western & Pettit, 2010). While these rates of parental incarceration were shocking and frightening, the outcomes for children of incarcerated parents proved even more astonishing.
Research shows that, on average, forty-two to 54 percent of children of incarcerated parents are predicted to continue living in poverty as a result of their parents’ absence (Western & Pettit, 2010). Twenty-three percent of children of incarcerated parents are suspended or expelled from school, compared to four percent of the general student body (Western et al., 2010). Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to have poor mental and physical health (Lee, Fang, & Luo, 2013). Children of incarcerated parents have lowered pursuit of higher education (Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016). And so on.

These many disadvantages and the stunted achievement trajectories associated with parental incarceration led me to question how, given that I identify with those most affected, I was able to overcome the odds that were illustrated in the research. How was I able to graduate from my under-resourced high school and not only make it to a university as renowned as Stanford, but also continue to achieve since my arrival?

In 2017, my heightened interest in the effects of parental incarceration led me to conclude that my defiance of the trends associated with parental incarceration was a direct result of the privileged supplementary educational opportunities that my mother advocated for on my behalf: an individualized educational program; unlimited access to the school’s psychologist; private tutoring and college preparation; among other things. My educational opportunities allowed for flexibility and healing as I attempted to be a competitive student while simultaneously coping with my father’s involvement with the justice system. This opportunity was afforded by my mother’s economic prowess and her own experience in and knowledge of higher education.

In contrast to my experience, many children of incarcerated parents are poor (defined as twice the official poverty level or less), and a substantial number of these children’s parents have low educational attainment (Murphey & Cooper, 2015). Of all 20 to 34-year-old men without a high school diploma or equivalent in the country, 12.1 percent of whites, seven percent of Hispanics, and 37.1 percent of Blacks –
more than one in three – are behind bars (Western & Pettit, 2010). Additionally, incarceration tends to be spatially concentrated in impoverished neighborhoods; the median annual income of the average incarcerated man prior to incarceration is $19,650 and of the average incarcerated woman is $13,890 (Hagan & Foster, 2010; Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). Hence, children whose parents’ are poor and minimally educated, through no fault of their own, are the most at risk of experiencing the devastating effects of parental incarceration.

The incongruence between my own experience of parental incarceration and the dominant narrative of children affected by parental incarceration led me to question how schools and educational institutions can better support and promote the educational and economic mobility of children of incarcerated parents. As I became aware of the racial and economic inequalities that underlay the realities of parental incarceration, I was galvanized into pursuit of answers and justice.

Impassioned and determined, I became more comfortable with and transparent about the truth of my father’s absence, and as a result, peers at Stanford began sharing with me how they, too, had experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lives. This disclosure helped me realize that my story was not at all anomalous, but illustrative of the profound resilience that exists within the population of children with histories of parental incarceration. However, there is very little literature highlighting this resilience, which I describe in Chapter Two, and I have yet to find any research investigating resilience and success in the pursuit and attainment of higher education among this demographic of children.

**Research Questions and Scope of Research**

My goal for this study and thesis, therefore, was to address the void of educational research about children of incarcerated parents beyond the secondary system and offer evidence to researchers and practitioners of how children of incarcerated parents are thriving in higher educational settings. As such, I was interested in hearing from children of the incarcerated themselves – who have so often been
overlooked and silenced by a broken system – about how and why they have been successful in higher education despite the circumstances and statistics that suggest their failure. Specifically, I am interested in what college students who have histories of parental incarceration perceive to be 1. the factors that enabled them to navigate the college application process and those that posed obstacles to the process; 2. the resources and support systems that have contributed to their retention in higher education; 3. the obstacles to their performance in higher education; and the effects, if any, of their parents’ incarceration on their college experience. These questions focus on the students’ perceptions of the relation between their parents’ incarceration and their experiences in higher education. Given the diversity of experiences that exist within the reality of parental incarceration across different places, times, and circumstances, these perceptions are by no means intended to be prescriptive of the factors sufficient for students’ success. Rather, I use the patterns across participating students’ perceptions to reveal what exactly these students did to achieve academic excellence and how we can displace the disproportionate burdens they bore onto learning environments and educational institutions. As such, the results of this study do not imply what those students of the incarcerated who have not matriculated should strive for. Instead, they inform the questions necessary to both direct researchers as the body of literature surrounding children of incarcerated parents in education continues to expand as well as forge meaningful reforms in the U.S. public education system that better promote both positive opportunities and outcomes for children of the incarcerated.

Before proceeding, I would like to elucidate what this thesis is and what this thesis is not. It is not at all about the guilt or innocence of those who are incarcerated. Rather, it is about their status as parents and how this impacts their children. Some may say that, by sheer nature of being the offspring of the imprisoned, children of incarcerated parents are already too entrenched in the influences of criminality that no number of resources or support systems can help them escape the intergenerational cycles of poverty and imprisonment. To that, I urge readers to put aside their judgements of the incarcerated and of
the poor, and understand that this is a simple discussion about children who have unequal outcomes and opportunities – inequalities that manifest themselves along racial and economic lines – when compared to the general student body. This is a discussion about how to identify the structural changes necessary to reduce such inequalities in educational outcomes and access to higher education for these children. Additionally, this is not a discussion about psychological processes through which children succeed and don’t succeed, nor about what behavioral interventions can be instituted to change children to be higher achieving in educational settings. Too often, conversations around high-risk youth have placed the locus of change on individuals, asking how children can become tougher, more obedient, and more psychologically resilient. This thesis strives to resist the common and convenient practice of burdening children with the unit of change, and is rather about how the structure of children’s environments can adapt to the circumstances of parental incarceration by minimizing obstacles to and integrating more support systems to facilitate positive educational outcomes for these students.

With that, in order to frame this research of students of incarcerated parents in higher education, I would like to provide an overview and background information about the scope of parental incarceration. I will first briefly outline some of the health and educational effects of parental incarceration. Subsequently, I will highlight the increasing awareness of children of incarcerated parents in American culture and some associated policies and practices that have been implemented to address the welfare of these children.

**Invisible Victims, Invisible Students**

Although the effects of parental incarceration are often concomitant with the perils of poverty, there are certain unique outcomes that cannot be explained by economic status nor by the mere absence of a parent. Children of the incarcerated, unlike those whose parents are absent due to parental death or divorce, are more prone to adverse long-term mental and physical health, including depression,
aggression, and anxiety, as well as migraines, asthma, and high cholesterol (Lee et al., 2013). They are also more susceptible to economic hardship and justice involvement themselves both in adolescence and adulthood (Martin, 2017). For these reasons, among others, children of incarcerated parents are often the inadvertent, invisible victims of the criminal justice system, rarely considered when decisions are made regarding their parents and almost always without access to the support and social services available to crime victims (Martin, 2017). This failure of the justice system to address the unique needs of justice-involved parents’ children has unintended implications for these children’s behavior and performance in educational settings.

While the quantified degree of the effect of parental incarceration on children’s outcomes has been difficult to conclusively or causationally determine, education is one of the few risk factors for which there does seem to be a direct association with parental incarceration. The effects of parental incarceration on children’s academic performance manifest beginning in elementary school and continue through postsecondary education (Murphey & Cooper, 2015). These effects span from limited school connectedness to absenteeism to disciplinary action to dropout (Trice & Brewster, 2004; Cho, 2011; Jacobsen, 2015; Western & Pettit, 2010; Murphey & Cooper, 2015). Furthermore, these consequences are augmented by the stigma associated with parental incarceration that children experience in educational settings by peers and teachers (Brown & Barrio-Minton, 2017). The deeply entrenched negative stereotypes of criminal justice involvement in society often “bleed” from those who are incarcerated onto children, who by no fault of their own are perceived as criminal themselves, of lesser value, worth, and less deserving of mercy than other members of society (Arditti, 2012b; Nadeau, 2010). Furthermore, in anticipation of ostracism and discrimination, children and families are not always willing to share information about incarceration with school personnel (Nadeau, 2010). Consequently, these children are usually an invisible population that educators are likely to make contact with but often ill-equipped to meet their unique needs.
Children of Incarcerated Parents in the Public Consciousness and Educational Responses

The scope of the problems facing children of incarcerated parents has begun to transcend insulated conversations in the child welfare and criminal justice spheres, slowly permeating the public consciousness. For example, in 2005, investigative journalist Nell Bernstein’s book, *All Alone in the World*, uncovered the harsh realities of the U.S. penal system on children and families, prompting a series of similar exposés in the *Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle* over subsequent years. In 2013, the popular television program *Sesame Street* introduced the character, Alex, whose father is serving time in prison, in order to normalize the reality of parental incarceration and speak directly to the millions of children who have lived with a parent behind bars; additionally, *Sesame Street* introduced an accompanying “tool kit” to give children and families resources to cope with the loss of a loved one to incarceration.

Although the issue of parental incarceration has slowly been penetrating public awareness, there still exist few policies and practices to address children of incarcerated parents in systems beyond that of criminal justice. While law enforcement agencies tend to increasingly train their officers to be child-conscious when making arrests and correctional facilities have made visitation easier and more child-friendly for families, social service agencies and schools have yet to adopt policies and practices that support children of incarcerated parents. Part of the difficulty in implementing such policies lay in the fact that schools and child welfare systems do not systematically track the number of children of incarcerated parents who cycle through their jurisdictions (Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper & Shear, 2010).

Although most school systems are not presently addressing the unique needs of children of incarcerated parents, researchers have nevertheless made extensive connections between positive school environments and children’s success and made recommendations for how schools can better promote this
success. Common to all of this research is that it focuses only on children of incarcerated parents in elementary and secondary school systems. While there are some limited statistics about children of incarcerated parents beyond secondary education, all of which suggest that their achievement is suboptimal compared to the general population, the literature is scant regarding the structural support systems that promote the success of children of incarcerated parents in higher education and the factors that may hinder such achievement (Brown & Barrio-Minton, 2017).

Despite the dearth of research about children of incarcerated parents in higher education, a number of organizations are addressing the potential adversities facing prospective college applicants who have or have had an incarcerated parent. To address the ever-increasing exorbitant costs of college tuition and the financial instability that frequents families of the incarcerated, the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated at Rutgers University has established a centralized database of scholarships available exclusively for applicants of incarcerated parents, as well as scholarships for which these students broadly qualify, such as the Gates Millennium and the Sallie Mae: First in my Family funds. The Creative Corrections Education Foundation, in addition to a scholarship fund, has developed programs in several cities to give affected youth who have dropped out of high school the opportunity to obtain their GED while simultaneously complete vocational education programs. Still others, such as ScholarCHIPS, have created networks of college-bound and college-attending children of incarcerated parents and provided peer mentoring during the college application process. These named organizations, among many others, have committed to the educational resilience of children of incarcerated parents, making higher education an opportunity not in spite of but because of their parents’ incarceration.

However, researchers and academia have yet to identify the factors that can be instituted at a scalable level to systematically make the attainment and completion of higher education a legitimate possibility for the whole of the 2.7 million children afflicted by parental incarceration. This thesis thus attempted to identify some of these factors by soliciting and analyzing the perceptions of a sample of children of
incarcerated parents who have successfully matriculated and are presently working to complete their degrees.
Chapter Two  
A Review of the Literature

To understand the experiences of children of incarcerated parents in higher education, it is first necessary to expound upon the effects of parental incarceration on children, the factors that mitigate and worsen these effects, and how the existing literature has addressed such effects in educational settings. In the following sections, I will begin by addressing any preconceived notions about parental imprisonment and subsequently discuss the adversity that parental incarceration poses to children and families; the educational outcomes and experiences of children of incarcerated parents in educational settings; and the protective and risk factors that affect the educational resilience of these children.

Misconceptions about Incarcerated Parents

The spike in parental incarceration mainly occurred in the last generation, up from one in 125 children in 1985 to one in 28 children as of 2010 (Western & Pettit, 2010). To be sure, this spike coincided not with an increase in crime rates, but rather with changing patterns in criminal sentencing laws (Uggen & McElrath, 2014). Truth-in-sentencing policies, requiring people to serve at least 85 percent of their sentences; three strikes laws, sentencing people to 25 years to life if convicted for their third felony; mandatory minimum sentencing laws, requiring people to serve a standardized amount of time for particular crimes; and the heightened criminalization of non-violent drug crimes all contributed to the ballooned imprisonment rate, which more than quintupled between 1985 and 2010 (Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014). These harsher policies sent hundreds of thousands of mothers and fathers to jail and prison, marking them with a lifelong criminal record.

Contrary to popular belief, the vast majority of these parents were not at all absent from or uninvolved with their children’s lives, as 42 percent of fathers and 60 percent of mothers lived with their
children prior to incarceration and another 40 percent of nonresident fathers had regular visitation with their children (Uggen & McElrath, 2014). The fact that most incarcerated parents were in fact assuming the basic responsibilities of parenting prior to their confinement dispels some commonly held myths about justice-involved parents being absent, neglectful, in-and-out-of jail, etc. (Uggen & McElrath, 2014). Although there do certainly exist justice-involved parents who are neglectful or abusive, as there do across every social and economic stratum, there are many more who had loving, caring relationships with their children prior to their incarceration. This simple truth underlies the oftentimes relentless effects that the absence of a parent to incarceration can have on children.

An Enduring Trauma

The existing need for specific support systems for children of incarcerated parents in education is driven by the unique aspects of the trauma associated with losing a parent to incarceration. Research has categorized parental incarceration as an adverse childhood experience (ACE) for children and a unique predictor of childhood trauma symptomology (Arditti, 2012a). ACEs are known to impede social, emotional, and cognitive neural development, and such impediments are associated with high-risk behavior, disease, disability, and social problems in adolescence and adulthood, sometimes resulting in early mortality (Felitti et al., 1998). The incarceration of a parent has been categorized as an “enduring trauma,” typified by the continual and repeated stressors of poverty (as many of those who experience parental incarceration come from impoverished communities); shifts in households and caregivers when a parent is incarcerated; repeated exposure to the various bodies of the criminal justice system (e.g. to the police at the time of parent’s arrest, courts in trial proceedings, prisons during parent visitation, etc.); community violence; and so on (Myers, Smarsh, Amlund-Hagen, & Kennon, 1999). The effects of this trauma have concerning implications for children’s development and wellbeing.
Research has established that these particular stressors exclusive to parental incarceration lead to certain childhood adjustment disorders that are not characteristic of children who have lost or been separated from their parent for some other reason. Joyce Arditti, a psychologist in family sciences and a leader in the study of parental incarceration, found that when children believed their parent to be absent due to a socially acceptable reason, such as being away at work or in the hospital, there was no evidence of behavioral disorders, however when children were aware of their parent’s absence due to incarceration, children were found to either act out, which took the form of externalizing behaviors, or act in, internalizing or directing behaviors inward, which led to children’s emotional distress (Arditti, 2012a). This study demonstrated that the general absence of a parent does not necessarily affect child pathology, but that parental absence to incarceration, specifically, can have damaging effects on children. Other research has found that children affected by parental incarceration have displayed the symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including sleeping and concentration difficulties; depression; emotional demonstrations of anger, fear, and guilt; and flashbacks and nightmares (Kampfner, 1995). Thus, children are not only are traumatized by the instability immediately following the absence of their incarcerated parent, but they are also ceaselessly tormented by the long-term unpredictability of their parents’ whereabouts; uncertainty of how to adjust to the absence; and frequent neglect of their own emotional needs. Additionally, the witness of their parents’ powerlessness makes children feel extremely vulnerable themselves (Kampfner, 1995).

Further, Arditti has extensively researched how the symptoms of trauma are further impacted by the quality of children’s relationships with their parent prior to the incarceration; the quality of caregiving they receive during their parent’s confinement; and the extent and nature of their contact with their incarcerated parent (Arditti, 2012a; Arditti 2012b). For instance, when the incarceration leads to separation from an important attachment figure or significant financial provider, children’s socioemotional vulnerability and manifestation of traumatization is intensified. While there do exist
instances in the which the removal of a parent can improve the quality of caregiving of a child by protecting them from harmful behaviors, such as drug abuse or neglect, Aritti’s research overwhelming suggests that the quality of caregiving deteriorates when a parent is incarcerated, as children often bounce between caregivers and are forced to alter their attachment relationships, contributing to emotional and cognitive trauma symptomatology (Aritti, 2012a). Furthermore, for children who have the opportunity to visit their parent in jail or prison, the process of visitation can often be extremely difficult for both child and parent, as children are often searched by correctional officers; prohibited from making physical contact with their parent; and restricted from exploring and playing, all of which are difficult for children to understand. Instances as such threaten the psychological safety of children and can lead to insecure attachment with the parent, traumatic separation, and attention problems on the part of the child; these consequences can lead many children to resent the incarcerated parent and no longer want to visit, jeopardizing the prospect of an enduring bond between parent, child, and other family members throughout the parents’ sentence (Aritti, 2012a; Aritti, 2012b).

Given that many children of incarcerated parents are heavily concentrated in urban, poverty-stricken areas, researchers have considered that the ecological factors of poverty pose more of a risk to children of incarcerated parents than the absence of a parent itself. However, such considerations are not supported by evidence, which rather suggests that children of incarcerated parents face considerably more hardship than children in similar socioeconomic stratum who have not experienced parental incarceration. These children are significantly more likely to experience material hardship in more than one area of need; experience a greater degree of residential instability; and rely more heavily on public assistance for subsistence following parents’ incarceration, as compared to their non-affected counterparts (Gellner, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2009). Even when controlling for economic risk and single parent status, children of incarcerated parents are more likely than their peers to experience material hardship and childhood trauma symptomatology (Aritti & Salva, 2015). This empirical research
establishes that although poverty and economic adversity may contribute to the effects of parental incarceration, it is by no means the root of such symptoms.

The trauma and damaging consequences of parental incarceration are further augmented by the stigmatization that children and families tend to encounter following their parents’ contact with the justice system (Arditti, 2012a). Because of their proximity to and affiliation with “criminals,” who are a heavily stigmatized group in American consciousness, children of incarcerated parents tend to similarly experience stigmatization even though they do not possess the characteristics of criminals (Phillips & Gates, 2011). From very young ages, children demonstrate awareness of dominant societal prejudices toward stigmatized groups and can internalize these negative attitudes, often leading to lowered self-esteem and heightened emotional problems (Arditti, 2012b). Stigmatization often poses a paradoxical conundrum for families affected by parental incarceration: in order to protect their children from the negative consequences of stigmatization, caregivers often conceal the parental incarceration from children or encourage children to conceal the truth of their parents’ absence from others, which precludes caregivers from seeking potentially ameliorative psychological and social resources for themselves and their children, allowing the symptoms of the trauma to persist (Phillips et al., 2011). Hence, the threat of stigmatization posed by incarceration creates an underlying dynamic that further complicates the trauma of afflicted children.

**Educational Outcomes**

As though the traumas of parental incarceration weren’t adverse enough in their personal lives, children are forced to carry the weight of their parents’ absence with them to school. While parental incarceration is significantly associated with a number of health disadvantages for children, it notably contributes to those that affect learning. A study of the National Survey of Children’s Health, after adjusting for demographic, socioeconomic, and familial characteristics, found that 15.29 percent of
children of incarcerated parents have a learning disability, compared to 7.41 percent of children who do not have an incarcerated parent; 18.01 percent have attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), compared to 7.09 percent; 10.39 percent experience behavioral or conduct problems, compared to 2.62 percent; and 6.35 percent experience developmental delays, compared to 3.33 percent. The study found that parental incarceration was more significantly associated with learning disabilities than other family adversities, including parent divorce, separation, and death (Turney, 2014). Beyond these observed impediments to learning, the effects of parental incarceration are further demonstrated by children’s performance and achievement in school settings.

The children of incarcerated parents are at disproportionate risk of experiencing educational problems compared to the general student population. Although there are highly varied results regarding the extent of the relationship between parental incarceration and children’s academic achievement and a causal pattern has not yet been established, the literature nevertheless supports that parental incarceration is a significant indicator of adverse school outcomes, suggesting that the cumulative effects of parental incarceration decrease students’ educational engagement and academic success (Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016). The effects of parental incarceration on children’s academic performance are significant across all ages, and differences in achievement are observed as early as elementary school. Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to repeat a grade or have their household be contacted by their school about their own behavioral problems, generally having more “school problems” than other children (Murphey & Cooper, 2015). Children aged six to eleven are susceptible to ever more salient effects, experiencing lower school engagement – which is qualified as completing all required school work, demonstrating an interest and curiosity in learning new things, and caring about academic success – than children not affected by parental incarceration (Murphey & Cooper, 2015). These adverse effects tend to follow these children all the way to higher education, with children of incarcerated fathers having a college graduation rate of 15 percent and children of incarcerated mothers having a graduation rate of one
to two percent, compared to the overall undergraduate graduation rate of 59 percent (Brown & Barrio-Minton, 2017).

These adverse outcomes can be linked to the aforementioned trauma symptomatology of parental incarceration. For example, both the internalizing and externalizing behaviors associated with parental incarceration symptomology can impact the extent to which a child will feel connected to and engaged in school; a child’s conscious and subconscious preoccupation with the absence of their parent can weaken their ostensible interest in learning materials, desire to complete assignments, and attachment to the school and teachers (Murray & Cooper, 2015; Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016). Additionally, the aggression and externalizing behavior associated with the trauma of parental incarceration can often lead students to misbehave in the classroom, heightening students’ risk of disciplinary action, especially suspension and expulsion, as 23 percent of these students have been expelled or suspended from school, compared to only four percent of the general student population (Jacobsen, 2015; Western & Pettit, 2010).

Additionally, students of the incarcerated are at a higher risk of school dropout than the general student body, although the exact rates are contested. One small, localized study of parental incarceration observed that, whereas the national school dropout rate was nine percent at the time of the study in 2004, the school dropout rate amongst children of incarcerated mothers who themselves had dropped out of school was 36 percent and for children whose incarcerated mothers had obtained their high school diploma was 15 percent (Trice & Brewster, 2004). Studies of larger longitudinal datasets have suggested that the difference in school dropout rates between students of incarcerated parents and their counterparts is not as considerable, but nevertheless significant (Cho, 2011). Regardless of the exact rates of truancy, the traumatic realities of parental incarceration are, to some extent, found to push children to drop out of school, whether that be to work to support their family financially, watch younger siblings while their resident guardian is at work, cope with the instability accompanying their parents’ absence, or a host of other possible reasons.
Interactional Experiences

Given the breadth and depth of the trauma of parental incarceration, it is to be expected that children with histories of parental justice involvement carry the stress of their parent’s absence with them to the school and classroom. Although the academic struggles faced by many children of incarcerated parents are well documented, there has been limited research directly examining the interactional experiences of children of incarcerated parents in the school setting. Nevertheless, there have been several seminal studies investigating the ways that teachers and counselors perceive and support children of incarcerated parents in school environments.

Teacher Interactions with Children of Incarcerated Parents.

Dallaire, Ciccone, and Wilson’s landmark 2010 study, conducted in the field of developmental psychology, was the first to examine teachers’ awareness of and experiences with children of incarcerated parents in the classroom setting (Dallaire, Ciccone, & Wilson, 2010). The researchers administered two complementary studies – the second building off of the first – in three schools in a Virginia school district’s most high-poverty, high-crime neighborhoods. Study One, through administering a twelve-item questionnaire in conjunction with open-ended interviews, found that teachers reported students of the incarcerated to experience more problem-related academic behaviors in schools – such as tardiness, truancy, suspension, expulsion, being sent to the principal’s office, repeating a grade, etc. – and fewer of the unproblematic-related academic behaviors – such as making honor roll, being placed in advanced courses, etc. – compared to other students. Teachers saliently mentioned the compromised quality of caregiving as the greatest risk to these children’s academic achievement. Distinct student behavioral and emotional problems were reported to have subsequently arisen following the absence of an incarcerated parent, teachers citing both externalizing and internalizing behaviors. Elementary school teachers were
found to be more aware of their students’ family situations than middle and high school teachers, and reported that younger children were more vulnerable to the developmental effects of parental incarceration than older students, who were perceived to have heightened coping mechanisms to adapt to the loss of the parent. Most poignantly, in the first study, one-third of participating teachers described that they had witnessed other educators lower their expectations for children of incarcerated parents or become more unprofessional with and unsupportive of these students following the incarceration of the parent (Dallaire, Ciccone, & Wilson, 2010).

Study Two was designed to examine elementary school teachers’ expectations of students with incarcerated mothers. Ultimately, students whose mothers were absent to prison were perceived by teachers as less competent than students whose mothers were absent for other reasons, such as away at school or in rehabilitation. Taken together, these studies suggest that some teachers are susceptible to stigmatizing and lowering their sensitivity toward students with justice-involved parents – despite the considerable training they receive to withhold judgement and stereotyping of students – putting already-struggling youth at greater risk of academic challenges (Dallaire, Ciccone, & Wilson, 2010).

School Counselor Interactions with Children of Incarcerated Parents.

Further research of school counselors’ service-delivery to children affected by parental incarceration has found that, even when there is an awareness of the circumstances and needs of these children in school settings, there is mixed success in effectively delivering responsive services to these students. Through a series of focus groups, individual interviews, observations, and reviews of school district documents, Brown and Barrio-Minton conducted a case study across ten schools to investigate how school counselors serve children of incarcerated parents (Brown & Barrio-Minton, 2010). The study found that school counselors are uniquely positioned to support the needs of these students through their ability to offer individual counseling, group counseling, and crisis response, often related to the social/emotional or academic concerns following the absence of an incarcerated parent. However, these
counselors reported that privacy and confidentiality matters, as well as the unique challenges faced specifically by students affected by parental incarceration made it difficult to offer specialized group therapy; hence, group work rather focused on socialization, loss, and friendship broadly defined. Counselors reported frequently connecting students of incarcerated parents with mental health services – such as behavioral health, alcohol and drug treatment, and mobile crisis responses – and social services – such as truancy court support and child protectives services. Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of intra-school collaboration to support children of incarcerated parents, especially between school social workers, child protective services workers, nurses, behavior coaches, administrators, athletic coaches, teachers, and school resource officers; transparent flow of information among these stakeholders as a means to provide more background information about the circumstances of students affected by parental incarceration was said to make stakeholders more appropriately responsive to students’ needs.

Despite the ability of school counselors to be responsive to and provide services to students’ needs, relevant stakeholders nevertheless face significant barriers to effectual services (Brown & Barrio-Minton, 2010). Counselors named the ethical and legal challenges of preserving the privacy of children and navigating custody, especially when it came to obtaining signatures and determining who is legally responsible for students. The counselors’ lack of awareness, understanding of, and training on the unique needs of parental incarceration also raised ethical challenges. Counselors expressed that they occasionally conflicted with the parenting/caregiving styles of those responsible for students of the incarcerated and frustrations in working with parents and caregivers who were secretive about family circumstance. The counselors faced further challenges when they as school officials were aware of the incarceration, but when the residential parent of a student facing parental incarceration withheld information about the reasons for the incarcerated parent’s absence from their child. Additionally, in alignment with Dallaire et al., counselors in this study revealed that teachers had negative perceptions of children of incarcerated parents and their families, making within-school collaboration and advocacy for
children of incarcerated parents ever-more strenuous (Brown & Barrio-Minton, 2017). Prior to this study, researchers had for years recommended in the conclusions of their studies that it was incumbent on school counselors to improve service delivery to children of incarcerated parents in schools settings. Brown and Barrio-Minton’s findings of counselors’ experiences with students of justice-involved parents, however, illustrate that schools face a web of complicating factors beyond the scope of school counselors when attempting to respect the privacy of these students and their families while simultaneously striving to promote their academic and social wellbeing.

Protective Educational Factors

Expanding upon the mixed success of school counselors in promoting the achievement of children of the incarcerated, Nichols, Loper, and Meyer – researchers in psychology and social work – highlighted additional elements that mitigate the typically negative relationship between parental incarceration and educational outcomes. This study identified a number of compensatory factors – those that improve success among both high- and low-risk students – that operate for children of incarcerated parents in much the same way as for their non-affected peers. Feeling connected to one’s parent and family, for example, are indicative of increased academic achievement and lowered rates of truancy among students of the incarcerated, as they are in the general student body. As for compensatory school resources, smaller schools and those that provide mental health services have lowered rates of truancy among children of incarcerated parents and their peers. Depending on the setting of the services offered, the provision of mental health services had a positive impact on cumulative academic achievement among children of incarcerated parents; when these students were referred to counseling services in the community, rather than onsite services at school, they had higher cumulative academic achievement. Referrals to community services lessens the interference of mental health services with academics and classroom activities and also gives students access to a wider range of qualified professionals. While
children of incarcerated parents are expected to gain from these factors afforded by the general student population, they are less likely to benefit from factors typically afforded by other high-risk youth (Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016).

Nichols et al.’s landmark finding confirmed that children of incarcerated parents are exceptional among high-risk students. The aforementioned study illuminated that, whereas school connectedness is usually considered a protective factor – or resource that uniquely predicts a high-risk student’s success – in the general student body, parental incarceration undoes the bolstering effect of school connectedness on students’ pursuit of higher education. In other words, even if a student affected by parental incarceration enjoys school and feels supported in their environment, they are no more likely than students of incarcerated parents who do not enjoy school to pursue higher education, suggesting that children of incarcerated parents tend to be without a protective factor normatively afforded by their peers. Evidencing that even a motivated student affected by parental incarceration may be prevented from continuing their education beyond high school, this study illuminates that parental incarceration can be necessarily sufficient to bar children from higher education (Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016).

What Nichols and colleagues don’t explain, however, is how children who do matriculate overcome the ostensible barrier of parental incarceration. Potential lack of economic stability, time, and emotional energy, as well as caregivers’ lack of knowledge about the necessary steps to attain higher education are primarily cited as the reasons why even the most motivated of students of the incarcerated don’t attain higher education. The authors postulate that school support systems including “transition planning, family meetings, placement test preparation, identifie[ication] and assist[ance] with scholarship and loan applications, and general guidance through the college admission process,” in addition to connecting students “to an adult, either within the school or the community, who is well versed in the challenges related to pursuing post-secondary education,” can help students of incarcerated parents continue their education beyond high school (Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016, p. 1106). The researchers
conclude by directing future research to continue to explore the characteristics that promote the academic success of students with incarcerated parents.

**Research Gap**

At the time that this research was conducted, I had yet to find any literature that responded to Nichols and colleagues’ call to action. Consequently, with this thesis, I intended to offer a contrasting view to the circumstances of high rates of school dropout, expulsion, and suspension; lowered school engagement and connectedness; and misbehavior in educational environments among children of incarcerated parents that predominate literature. As such, through a qualitative analysis, this thesis centers the voices of young people with histories of parental incarceration who, at the time that this research was conducted, were achieving in a highly selective institution of higher education, Stanford University, and provides critical information about the factors that they perceive to be most integral to their success.
Chapter Three
Methodology

Research Design

In order to investigate what students with histories of parental incarceration perceive to be the protective factors that contribute to their success in higher education, this study employed a semi-structured, qualitative research method for data collection and analysis. Unlike previous studies regarding children of incarcerated parents in education that focused solely on educators’ interactions with or the statistical outcomes of these students, this study design provides specific insight into students’ own perceptions of their experiences in education – both secondary and postsecondary – and exposes the perceived impact of parental incarceration on the most affected individuals.

Sampling

Upon receiving permission from the Institutional Review Board and the Student Data Oversight Committee to conduct this investigation, I recruited participants with self-identified histories of parental incarceration from the Stanford University campus. Students were invited to participate in this study via various email list serves to which I was connected. These lists forwarded emails to Stanford’s Black, Latinx, and Native communities; the community service community; the women’s community; as well as the general campus dorms. While only an approximate, these lists and the recruitment email likely reached over 1,200 students on the Stanford campus. The recruitment email introduced myself as the researcher, explained the purpose of the study and eligibility requirements, described the interview and compensation process, and provided a link to an interest form. This interest form first described that the only eligibility requirements were that an individual self-identified as having a history of parental
incarceration and was an undergraduate student at Stanford. Thereafter, the form presented a simple definition of parental incarceration to prospective participants – that is, whether either of a prospective participant’s parents had spent any period in jail or prison during their own lifetime – and asked if they identify as having been the child of a formerly or presently incarcerated parent. The form then asked prospective participants if they would be willing to be contacted via email in order to participate in one, approximately sixty-minute interview about their experiences in higher education.

In total, 22 individuals completed the interest form. However, only 21 of these respondents were actually Stanford students, while one completed a masters at Stanford several years prior to when this study was conducted. I then personally contacted each respondent via email. With the exception of the non-Stanford student to whom I explained their ineligibility, through this email correspondence, I scheduled participants for a one-time, sixty-minute interview. In total, 16 of the 21 eligible respondents scheduled an interview. At this time, I also sent prospective participants a link to a demographic survey that collected students’ age, undergraduate year, gender identity, and race/ethnicity.

Ultimately, as some students did not arrive to their scheduled interviews, I interviewed twelve students in total. Of these students, five were first-year college students, three were second-year, three were fourth-years, and one was a master’s student who graduated from college in 2018. Although I intended for eligible participants to only be undergraduate students within the same university, I wanted to honor this participants’ vulnerability and courage for being willing to participate in this study, and therefore retained her in the sample. Each student of the sample experienced the absence of a father to incarceration. Two participants also experienced brief periods of maternal incarceration. One of these two also experienced the incarceration of his step-father. The periods of each students’ parental incarceration experience can be found in Table 1.

Participants were given the opportunity to choose pseudonyms for themselves, of which nine chose to do so; these names are listed in Table 1, along with all of the other solicited demographic
information. For those participants who did not choose pseudonyms, I identified them by the first letter of their self-identified sex (F - female; M-male) and a number.

**Table 1**: Participants’ Self-Identified Pseudonyms/Identifiers, Ages, Races, University Class Year, and Incarceration Information \((N = 12)\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name &amp; Pronouns</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>University Year</th>
<th>Incarcerated Parent(s)</th>
<th>Approximated Age(s) During Incarceration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue (she/her, they/them)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>12 to 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briona (she/her)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Hispanic &amp; White</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Birth to 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenna (she/her)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Chinese-American</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joey (she/her)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>African-American &amp; Korean</td>
<td>Frosh</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>4; 7; 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristoff (he/him)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Frosh</td>
<td>Biological Father</td>
<td>Birth to 6; 14 to 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Biological Mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Step Father</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luisa (she/her)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Master's student(^1)</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria (she/her)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Birth to 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant F1 (she/her)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Native American &amp; Mexican</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>7 to 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant F2 (she/her)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>Frosh</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>12 to 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant M1 (he/him)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Mexican-American</td>
<td>Frosh</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>13 to 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee (she/her)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>1 to 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan (they/them)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Black &amp; White</td>
<td>Frosh</td>
<td>Father/Mother</td>
<td>Birth to 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Each participant provided their own demographic information without choosing from predefined categories.\(^1\) Luisa did not attend Stanford for her undergraduate education.*
Interview Protocol

Interviews were conducted in a private room in the Stanford Project on Adaptation and Resilience in Kids (SPARK) Lab, which was generously offered to me by my advisor, Dr. Jelena Obradović. Prior to the start of each interview, I provided participants with background information about the nature of the research and its potential risks and benefits, as outlined in the consent form. Participants were given an additional chance to read the consent form at the beginning of their interviews and were asked to provide both written and verbal consent. At this point, participants were also given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym for themselves. I then described that the interview would be audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Finally, I emphasized that participants’ participation was completely voluntary, that they could skip any question at any time, and that they could discontinue the interview at any time.

Interviews were structured around those questions in the interview protocol, which can be found in the appendices. The semi-structured nature of these interviews allowed flexibility for me to encourage participants to elaborate on those responses that could have been relevant to answering the questions more fully. Additionally, the semi-structured interviews ensured that all participants answered the same questions while also allowing me to follow up on interesting points that participants mentioned. The interview protocol was designed chronologically, so as to ask participants to describe their experiences in order of their educational experiences: those prior to attending Stanford, their experience with the college application process, and their experiences since coming to Stanford. It was therefore necessary to adhere to the order of the questions in the interview protocol, rather than deviating too far based on participant responses. In anticipation that some participants had taken non-traditional paths to higher education, certain questions were personalized for students who immediately matriculated after high school and for those who took non-traditional paths (Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016). At the end of each interview, participants were asked if there was anything else they wanted to add about their experiences with
parental incarceration or in higher education, as well as if they had any questions for me as the researcher. Typically at this time, participants asked about my interest in researching parental incarceration, at which point I disclosed my personal investment in and experience in the matter; I only shared that I, too, had a history of parental incarceration if participants asked my interest in the work.

**Data Analysis and Confidentiality**

The audio recording of each interview was transcribed verbatim. I used the software Otter-AI to do an initial transcription of the interviews and then cleaned and completed these transcriptions by hand. After I completed these transcriptions, I applied a basic coding framework through the online qualitative coding software, NVivo. Data was coded over multiple passes, initially with first-cycle descriptive codes, followed by second-cycle, focussed coding to identify and synthesize major themes (Saldana, 2015). The work of Nichols et al. on the protective factors that influence the educational experiences of children of incarcerated parents were used to derive the initial deductive code for interview transcripts. Examples of these a priori codes included “test preparation,” “mentorship,” “identifying and assisting with scholarship and loan applications” and “college counseling” (Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016). However, throughout the first-pass coding, in-vivo codes emerged from the interview transcripts. These emergent codes ultimately proved more meaningful than the deductive codes, and I relied primarily on these codes in my second-pass and final data analysis.

The audio-recordings, transcripts, and survey data were stored on a password-protected laptop that was secured in a locked residence when not in use. Transcripts were anonymized and participants’ private and confidential information was preserved in all written and published data.
Limitations

This qualitative study was exploratory and hence serves to inform future research priorities at the intersection of parental incarceration and education, rather than to be prescriptive or conclusive of the factors that cause children of the incarcerated to attain and retain themselves in higher education. The sample was self-identified, not chosen at random, and extremely small, and thus cannot be representative of the diversity of experiences that exists within the reality of parental incarceration or the diversity of higher education experiences. Furthermore, this study only employed students’ retrospective perceptions of the factors that enabled them to navigate the college admissions process, as well as their transition to and experiences at Stanford. Therefore, this study does not evaluate the actual efficacy of these factors in promoting these students’ achievements. Although this study is descriptive, what it does achieve is to offer a unique lens into the self-described experiences of children with histories of parental incarceration who attend a highly selective university, which had not before been represented in the literature at the time this study was completed. Such a lens not only broadens the scope of the literature on the population of children of the incarcerated but also offers initial insights and action plans to future researchers when considering the resources that help students of incarcerated parents matriculate. Thus, although sampling and the retrospective qualitative nature of this study are conventionally considered limitations, they nevertheless help to envision the possibilities of what children of incarcerated parents can and should have opportunities to attain in education settings.
Chapter Four
Results and Discussion

In the introduction to this thesis, I expressed that the purpose of my research was to explore what certain children of incarcerated parents who succeed in higher education perceive to be the factors that have contributed to their success, despite the abundant statistics and literature that suggest their failure. Although I originally sought to emphasize the structural factors that have facilitated such success, the participants with whom I spoke revealed that, in order to understand these structural factors, it is also important to understand the individual-level factors that contributed to their achievement. Examining the individual cases of the twelve students of incarcerated parents in this sample serves as a lesson for how school systems and educational environments can promote certain protective factors at an institutional level for students of incarcerated parents, broadly, which I turn to in the conclusion. In this chapter, I outline the three most salient findings of my interviews. I begin by discussing how parental incarceration was perceived to be an impetus for educational performance for many students in this sample, driving them to succeed in school, rather than impede such success. Thereafter, I present and discuss how most participants perceived that their parental incarceration induced them to refrain from asking for and seeking help from others, as well as the social isolation that underlays this independence. Finally, I explore how the event of parental incarceration has informed these students’ future career and life aspirations.

Parental Incarceration as an Impetus for Educational Performance

Contrary and perhaps counterintuitive to the prevailing research findings that parental incarceration is a risk factor in education, a majority of participants expressed that their parents’ incarceration(s) was an impetus for their educational success and trajectory, rather than an impediment.
To be precise, I define “impetus for educational performance” as a students’ perception that their parent’s incarceration(s) caused or accelerated their high achievement in school. Seven of the twelve participants directly attributed their hard work in school to their parental incarceration, conveying that the event led them to use their education either to distract themselves from circumstances at home; to transcend circumstances at home; and/or to provide something uplifting for their families in the face of adversity. Two additional participants expressed that, although their parents’ incarceration did not catalyze their academic excellence, the event did incite personal effects that led them to reroute their preexisting academic performance towards new educational interests and academic concentrations. The following paragraphs describe the different manifestations of parental incarceration as an impetus for educational performance and thereafter discuss continuities across these manifestations.

**Education as Distraction from Parental Incarceration.**

For some of the students in this study, school was a means of distraction from the emotional turmoil that followed their parents’ incarceration. Three students explicitly identified how school allowed them to create distance between parts of their wellbeing, namely academic wellbeing, and the emotional effects of their parent’s imprisonment. For instance, Kristoff, who is quoted in the title of this thesis, described how school helped him to cope with the imprisonment of both his biological father and his stepfather, even framing the events as having certain beneficial impacts:

> [T]he positive aspect of having my parents incarcerated..., I had really no outlet other than reading and taking part in academia. That was my outlet... I eat, slept, and breathed academia. That was the only thing that kept me going. That was my motivation.

Kristoff spoke of how he was able to channel his reaction to the negative effects of his biological father’s incarceration and the abundance of consequences surrounding the incarceration (e.g. abuse, foster care,
poverty, etc.) into positive performance at school. In the absence of direct psychological services to mitigate his psychological reaction to these events, he rather used school as such a buffer.

Along the same lines, Luisa relied on school as a haven of stability in which she was not confronted by the emotions and experiences surrounding her father’s incarceration:

I think school was definitely something I dove into, I guess kind of to distract myself a little bit. It was an area where nothing unexpected was going to happen… School felt like a very safe place for me, because I was not expected to address those emotions or experience.

In retrospect, Luisa identified how such distraction through school may have had a detrimental effect on her emotional development or ability to process traumatic experiences, “but at the time it felt useful,” as it led to her academic achievement, she said. Similarly, participant M1 expressed that school “was just like a way to use what I was capable of – education – and just try to forget the problems back home.” All three of these participants were keenly aware of how using school to suppress thoughts and feelings about what their families were going through had detrimental effects on their psychosocial development. However, their ability to reframe these detriments in one area of their lives – family and home – as advantages in another part – school – promoted their educational tenacity, even if not directly helping them process their emotional reactions.

**Education as Upward Mobility from Parental Incarceration.**

Four participants, including some of those mentioned above, perceived their education as a mechanism of social, educational, and economic mobility to transcend the circumstances of parental incarceration and its symptoms. Participant F1 described how she, from a young age, was able to connect her family’s poverty and father’s incarceration to the educational attainment of her parents, and consequently “saw college as this big gateway and on the other side would be a better life.” As a result,
she began to work harder in school to enter that gateway. Kristoff explained how he not only used school to distract himself from his home life, but also as a part of a formula to escape this home life. “Good grades equals good college equals good job. And then I can get out of that [life at home].” One woman, Maria, similarly yet more explicitly identified her father’s absence to incarceration as the impetus for her financial and academic mobility: “[H]im being in prison was maybe a motivating factor for us to have a different life than the one that he and my mom experienced.” Maria, like others, was able to conceptualize that parental incarceration could be an inhibiting factor to success and school would allow her to avoid such inhibition. As such, these participants invested themselves in their education more so than they had prior to the incarcerations, facilitating their heightened performance.

**Education as Family Healing from Parental Incarceration.**

Poignant among the different manifestations of parental incarceration as an impetus for educational performance, five students expressed how, following their parents’ incarceration, they invested themselves in their education in order to make their families proud of and happy about something positive during times of such negative life events. For instance, Blue expressed how her father’s incarceration drove her to perform in school so that she could relieve her family of the stress and strain induced by her father’s absence:

[W]hen things were going on with my dad, then I would just go really hard at school and just make sure I was getting all good grades, all A's, really well-behaved so that my parents didn't have anything else to worry about, 'cause if they're already moving through so much, I don't want to be an extra burden… I… established that pattern of academic excellence despite all odds, and that [became] the narrative, also, that my extended family had given to me… [T]hey were like, “You've been through so much, but you are so amazing.” It gave me a really deep sense of value.
And so, my mentality was just like, “No matter what goes on, I'm gonna make everybody as proud as possible as I can, 'cause I want to be some sort of light for them.”

In this case, Blue’s father’s institutionalization and incarceration were not the direct catalysts for her educational performance. Rather, it was her determination to relieve the effect of the incarceration on the rest of her family that motivated her academic excellence. She framed education not as a mechanism of distraction or transcendence from the incarceration circumstances but as a method to inspire and uplift her family during a period of adversity and hopelessness. It should be noted that Blue’s family was already experiencing residential instability and financial insecurity prior to her father’s incarceration, which she identified as similarly distressing to herself and her family as the incarceration. Thus, although the incarceration did not directly induce her educational investment, it did inspire her desire to be that source of light for her family, thereby indirectly prompting her academic excellence. Similarly, Renee, whose father had been incarcerated since the time of her birth, identified that his justice-involvement “impacted my performance as far as I have to just make sure that I'm always doing well so that's not something else that [my family has to worry about].”

One participant, Briona, expressed that rather than wanting to uplift her whole family through her academic success, she specifically wanted to make her incarcerated parent proud and used school as an avenue to do so. As Renee, Briona’s father had also been incarcerated since the time of her birth, and she described how his reentry into her life during her elementary school years catalyzed her academic success:

[Es]pecially when... I started school, I was just really bent – and I always have been – on making him proud because, once he came into my life, I wanted a relationship with him. And I was like “If I just do good in school, he'll love me.” So that was really what inspired me to sort of, like, hit the books and be smart.
As such, these named participants’ internalization of education as something to make their families proud underlaid the indirect positive effect of their parents’ incarceration on their academic performance.

**Parental Incarceration as a Determinant of Educational Interests.**

Lastly, several participants expressed how, while their parent’s incarceration did not necessarily have an effect on their educational achievement, it did lead them to make certain educational choices as well as influenced their educational interests. Of the three participants for whom this was the case, two did not have involved relationships with their parent at the time of incarceration, and did not experience a directly negative or positive educational effect. Rather, knowledge and awareness of their fathers’ justice-involvement had personal effects that inspired a re-routing of their educational trajectory. Said participant F2:

> [I]t definitely had a personal effect… I always put my education first. So, I try not to let my personal stuff affect my education. But, when I found out [about my father’s incarceration],... that kind of gave me an identity crisis, in a way... [T]hat definitely shaped the direction I was heading, like the work I want to do..., how I kind of viewed the world.

Whereas, prior to her knowledge of her father’s incarceration, participant F2 was exclusively interested in being a physician, following this knowledge, she was inspired to study and work at the intersection of healthcare and criminal justice reform. Another participant, Ryan (they/their), described a similar relationship between their academic and professional aspirations and their father’s incarceration: “[W]hen I’m thinking about [the criminal justice system], I do instinctively tie it back to my own life. And so, it does make me really passionate about prison reform slash abolishment.” Ryan and their father’s lived experiences underscore their personal stake in the criminal justice system, thus prompting such investment into pursuing system reform. Unlike other participants who framed their investment in
education as a result of parental incarceration, these participants used their parent’s incarceration to define the trajectory of their preexisting academic excellence. They used school to take command of their identities as children of incarcerated parents and forge their educational pathways around such identity, thus motivating their sustained passion toward their goals.

Exceptions: Parental Incarceration as an Impediment to Education.

Of course, a couple of participants’ experiences did not fall into the aforementioned manifestations of parental incarceration as an impetus for educational achievement. Rather, the incarcerations impeded their preexisting academic performance, as is well demonstrated in much of the literature. For Jenna, whose father was incarcerated for six months during her college application process, this impediment was temporary:

I would say [my father’s incarceration] hasn't affected my academics… because it's been so pushed to the background. But during junior year [when he was incarcerated], it was definitely put to the forefront and it was something that just had to be dealt with at that moment, of which distracted me from my studies, amongst other things, and made it more difficult.

Although there was an immediate effect of the incarceration on Jenna’s school experience, like many of the other participants, she eventually regained the balance of her academic excellence by suppressing the personal effects of her father’s incarceration. While she did not explicitly say that she used school as a facilitator of this suppression, she was able to recenter school and learning as her primary outlet.

For another participant, Joey, such recentering was not as easy: [T]hinking about my father [and his incarceration], in general, can bring out a lot of emotions. So, in school, I've realized that sometimes I can't do my work because I'm such… in a low mood and then [there’s] the spiral of everything else.”
According to Joey, the negative consequences of incarceration have had an ongoing negative impact on her educational performance. Rather then the life event being a catalyst for educational performance, Joey has had to overcome the repeated incidents during which her father’s incarceration becomes a distraction and deterrent from her school performance. Jenna and Joey illuminate how, despite attending Stanford, students’ experiences with parental incarceration are highly nuanced and complex, unable to be fully categorized into a single cohesive description. Nevertheless, from the nine students whose experiences with parental incarceration were perceived to be an impetus for their educational performance, some revealing conclusions can be drawn.

**Discussion: The Positive Construal of Parental Incarceration.**

Perhaps it is unsurprising that the majority of this particular sample of students, at least as was disclosed in these research interviews, did not succumb to the negative educational effects that predominate the literature about children of the incarcerated. Attending a highly selective university, such as Stanford, unquestionably necessitated a positive attachment to educational institutions in order to achieve the caliber of academic excellence required for admission (Haskins & Jacobsen, 2017). Though this sample stands apart educationally from much of the previously studied samples of children of the incarcerated in certain ways, namely in that they have even attended college in the first place, what is perhaps more exceptional than this sample’s academic excellence is their construal of parental incarceration as a motivating catalyst.

The majority of the interviewed students framed their parent’s incarceration not necessarily as a positive life event, but still as something that was to be associated with their ability to achieve something positive – in this case academic excellence and educational mobility. Clinical psychologists of trauma and resilience have demonstrated that when individuals perceive extremely adverse events as something filled
with meaning from which one can learn and grow, such events are less likely to be traumatic for those
dividuals (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013). Reframing those traumatic events that initially generate a
negative response in more positive terms can lead people to react more resiliently to adversity (McRae et
al., 2010). The majority of participants in this sample adhered to patterns similar to those found in the
clinical psychology research. By gradually realizing that their parents’ incarceration was something that
they had the agency and flexibility to overcome through their academic achievement, participants were
able to mitigate many of the well-demonstrated negative effects of parental incarceration on academic
performance. Though not itself a formal structural support system, this positive construal of an
often-conceived traumatic life event was in itself a protective factor that predicted these students’
educational resilience.

**Independence is Not Asking for Help**

Although nine participants described how their parent’s incarceration accelerated their academic
achievement, which challenges much of the aforementioned reviewed literature, the entire sample of
students described how this educational success was attained without much reliance on others. This calls
attention to their own independence and aversion to seeking help from others, especially school officials
and peers, which aligns with existing literature that has found that children of the incarcerated have a
tendency towards social isolation and struggle to connect with and trust others (Nesmith & Ruhand,
2008). All participants expressed generally how a lot of their educational trajectory was facilitated by a
reliance on the self in order to succeed. Additionally, many participants either explicitly identified or
alluded to how parental incarceration and its associated circumstances caused them to avoid asking for
help or support from other people. One male participant spoke for many when he said that he doesn’t
reach out for help because “[A]fter that moment [of his father’s incarceration], I realized you can't really
depend on anyone. So, I just depended on myself.” Many students expressed an assurance in their own
ability to perform up to the same if not higher standard that they would had they sought help, as articulated by Jenna: “I think that no matter what happens... I'm confident enough in myself that essentially, wherever I go, I can make it work.” As such, Jenna and others signified a certain resourcefulness inherent to themselves that they, by any means, can dependably rely on to achieve both academic and personal goals. Although most participants similarly expressed an unwillingness to ask for help, however, they had different perceptions about the origin of their self-sufficiency, as described below.

**I Can Make it Work: Self-Efficacy and Independence.**

As articulated by Jenna above, she and four other participants conveyed a stable self-esteem when it came to their academic aspirations and performance. Such tendency to believe in one’s own innate ability to accomplish goals is known as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Participants who attributed their independence to self-efficacy unwaveringly trusted their own capacity to fulfill their goals and responsibilities, believing that success was up to themselves and nobody else. In the context of parental incarceration and its associated environmental risks, a resounding self-efficacy in participants is logical given that many participant were forced to assume certain responsibilities at a young age that most children don’t have to until later in life. For example, when discussing the college application process, Blue described that: “I led myself through it, but I think I was kind of used to doing that, even though it was challenging." She captures how she had to learn how to do things on her own at an early age and consequently, by the time she was ready to apply to college, although it was an entirely unfamiliar process, she was confident that her own competence and abilities sufficiently prepared her to successfully navigate the college application process. Similarly, the other participants who associated their independence with their ability to make things work also had to assume responsibilities at an early age—
such as taking on employment, helping around the house, caring for younger siblings, etc. – that they perceived to have equipped them to independently succeed academically.

In some instances, these students’ self-efficacy precluded them from accepting support even when it was unsolicitedly offered to them. For instance, Maria attributed her refusal to ask for help throughout her first couple of years of college as linked to an incident that predated her even stepping foot on campus, citing how prior to the beginning of her first year, an ethnic community center had sent her a letter expressing its support to her and her family:

I think that one reason maybe why I didn't reach out for help... is because before I got here, they [the community center] were sending us letters of how to help. And me being the person who's like, “I can figure things out on my own. I don't need help,” I thought that it was too much. I was like, “I don't need your help… I got into Stanford on my own.”

When the community center offered their support to Maria without her asking for such, she became defensive, seeing her own self-efficacy up to that point as sufficient for her to be able to successfully navigate the higher education environment, both academically and socially. In rejecting such support, Maria and others proved the worth and power of their self-efficacy as adequate for their success.

That a considerable portion of this sample of students attending a highly selective institution of higher education would attribute their success to their confidence in their own abilities seems not only reasonable but logical. Numerous studies across different populations have demonstrated how self-efficacy and academic performance are strongly linked processes (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001). As students acquire knowledge and master skills and material, they develop cues to assess how well they are learning and adjust their goals and practices accordingly to improve further learning (Schunk, 1991). This gives students a sense of control and agency over their academic performance. Thus, students are imbued with a confidence in themselves strong enough to subvert negative reactions to an adverse life event and instead establish and accomplish goals associated with positive outcomes (Miller, 2007).
You Can't Really Depend on Anyone: Distrust and Independence.

Two students expressed that their self-reliance wasn’t so much implicit in a confidence of the self, but rather resulted from an isolated moment during which their reliance on a previously-trusted person was violated and they subsequently refrained from trusting anybody thereafter. For one student, Luisa, the source of her mistrust emerged at school following the incarceration and subsequent suicide of her father while he was in prison. Upon the loss of her father, Luisa was called to the office of the principal, who she described as “unequipped” to approach her circumstances, consequently leaving her “not feeling supported or understood in the conversation, or listened to. And it honestly made me not want to approach people for help,” she admitted. That isolated incident in the principal’s office was the impetus for an enduring mistrust of authority, Luisa described in the midst of tears: “I think it is just this more generalized fear of asking for help, especially from authority figures of any kind... I think that in a lot of areas of my life, I have struggled to reach out to people who I perceive as having more power than I do in whatever situation asking for help.”

The aforementioned incident, which occurred in elementary school, was enough to impede Luisa from ever feeling comfortable seeking help from those in positions of power, especially those in educational spaces both throughout high school and in college, again. Although she could reliably depend on her own independence for academic success, Luisa’s self-reliance was not underscored by the same self-confidence as her peers who attributed their academic success to self-efficacy. Instead, the independence inadvertently arose from an educational professional’s failure to adequately support her in one of her greatest times of need.

Similarly, another participant described how following the incarceration of his father, who was previously the household’s primary earner, his extended family didn’t provide his nuclear family with the financial support that they had hoped for. Whereas he had previously believed that family was the most
valuable resource for support and help, the absence of familial backing led him to retreat from trusting
and seeking out support from others, exclusively counting on his own abilities and capacities to persist:
“[A]fter that moment, I realized you can't really depend on anyone. So, I just depended on myself and,
like, I don't even depend on my parents as much." Although he did not identify that his parents had
violated his trust as did his extended family, the circumstances of trust-breaching with the extended
family were sufficient to breach trust in all of his relationships.

That the abandonment of trust in one or a few relationships may have led to abandoning trust in
all relationships reveals the burden that certain students of incarcerated parents may bear while trying to
navigate educational environments. The reactions to and consequences of one interaction/incident in their
lives permeates all other spheres to the point that students’ inclination to seek potentially beneficial
resources is indefinitely crippled. Even though these students may know that they can be more successful
or more productive if they were to reach out to others for help, their anticipation of being disappointed or
betrayed nonetheless subverts any desire to do so in the first place. Hence, these two students knowingly
resolved to put extra work, time, and energy into their goals, some of which could perhaps be avoided or
minimized had they sought out support or resources from others.

I Picked That Up From Him: Familial Independence.

Finally, of those remaining students who described and delineated their self-sufficiency, their
individual independence was attributed to a collective family independence instilled in them by their
parents. For participant F1, this familial independence manifested itself at the individual level, as every
member of the family learned to rely on themselves to get by. She described how she emulated her
self-sufficiency after her father, who was in and out of jail throughout her childhood: “[M]y dad was very
prideful in that he would never ask for help because he was so sure that whatever it was, he can manage it
himself,” she said. “And I think I picked that up from him at that point.” The mixed-race student explained how her father’s lesson, which was indelibly implanted into her own practices, led her to persistently seek to work against stereotypes not only about Native American and Mexican children but also against stereotypes about children of incarcerated parents. As a result, she was compelled to always prove her capacity to fulfill responsibilities and goals by herself, priding herself on her individual accountability and effectiveness.

In other cases, familial independence entailed reliance on family members, but nobody else, for survival. For Renee, whose father had been incarcerated since the time of her birth, such family independence originated from her mother’s emphasis on the importance of family, maintaining that, in order to preserve privacy and status, one should rely exclusively on family and no one else: “[M]y mom really didn't like to ask anyone for anything outside of family, 'cause… family is meant to help each other when we're down and out… [A]nd you don't really go to anybody else 'cause it's, like, the shame of… [S]he felt like she had to prove that everything was okay.” Renee’s mother’s desire to show people outside of the family that everything was alright and stable was quickly internalized by Renee when she was finally old enough to understand that her father’s absence was a product of his incarceration. Thereafter, Renee took after her mother and desperately worked to preserve the privacy of her father’s incarceration as well as the family’s financial circumstances. Whereas she would before talk about her father joyfully and proudly, as she thought his absence was a result of an employment assignment upstate, things changed when her mother thought her old enough to explain the true conditions of her father’s absence:

That's when I understood the shame. And so, I just didn't want to talk about it at all. When people would bring up my dad, I just would move on to a different topic… I was embarrassed that that's [prison] where he was… I felt like it was a secret that I had to protect. I think that's when I understood the shame and why we couldn't talk about it.
Her mother’s lesson to her had become so inscribed in Renee at an early age that only after years of higher education were those boundaries able to begin breaking down. As a result of her family's collective independence from non-family members, she refrained from seeking supplementary educational help in high school and psychological resources once arriving to college. The familial independence and the according individual independence insulated Renee from pursuing those resources that she knew would be beneficial because the risk of disclosing the details of her family’s adversity were too high a gamble.

While the intergenerational teachings experienced by both of these two participants is typical of many families, Renee’s experience is reflected in much of the literature about children and families of the incarcerated (Phillips & Gates, 2011). Oftentimes, the non-incarcerated parent of children will conceal the incarceration from neighbors, friends, as well as their children’s educators in order to avoid any potential stigmatization, disapproval, or judgement from others. Families will obscure the details of a parent’s absence even if disclosing the incarceration to others would lead to much-needed physical, emotional, and social support for the family. This has been found to pose significant obstacles to educators of students with incarcerated parents, who may actively want to connect students to resources but are not be able to do so as a result of parental secrecy (Brown & Barrio Minton, 2017). Thus, although these student’s families have inculcated in them an unshakable self-determination and autonomy that have facilitated their educational ascension, they still are burdened by stunted access to help and support within educational spaces.

**Discussion: Consequences of Independence and Social Isolation.**

This demonstrated independence of the interviewed students necessarily entails a social isolation from peers and educators in educational institutions. By relying so heavily on themselves for academic achievement, it follows that students are less likely than most to consistently engage with others to
facilitate their success. Generally, children of incarcerated parents are known to distance themselves from their peers for fear of being shamed or demoralized (Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016). Furthermore, these children have been found to become more disconnected from school and teachers following the incarceration event. Resultantly, these students often begin to exhibit maladaptive behavior and lowered educational performance (Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016). As such, broadly speaking, social isolation following parental incarceration can have educational implications that include school dropout, diminished academic motivation, and other behaviors that affect school completion.

Similarly, eleven of the twelve participants alluded to experiencing some form of social isolation following their parents’ incarceration. For some participants, this isolation was subtle, as students cautiously refrained from a transparency with their peers and educators that they may have felt comfortable exercising prior to the incarceration event. As Luisa said, “[S]ocially, I avoided [talking about incarceration] like the plague. Like, most of my close friends don't know.” As in the literature, these students’ diminished transparency resulted from the anticipated stigma accompanying criminality and incarceration. They avoided talking about this aspect of their lives in particular while maintaining otherwise healthy and open relationships with peers.

For other students, however, this isolation was more abrupt and far-reaching. For instance, Kristoff described how the events surrounding his parents’ incarceration had deleterious effects that persist into the present: "I feel like socially [the incarcerations] made me inept to communicate with others. I just didn't feel like I could relate to other people at all. So, socially, it destroyed me.” Although he was able to maintain, if not improve, his performance in school, the parental incarcerations came at the cost of his ability to control his contact with others in the school environment. Whereas Kristoff’s social isolation was an inadvertent process, Participant F1’s profound social isolation was an active decision resulting from the inequity that she identified between her experiences and others:
I can't help but resent people who've had traditional healthy upbringings and I get very jealous, especially when... they complain... [H]ow are you so unappreciative of what you have?... I also just don't want to bother being their friend a lot of the time, because that's a very sore spot for me. 'Cause more than anything I wish for a normal family. And when I see people [in college] not actively being appreciative of that, my reflex is to push them away.

For this participant, the disparity between her own circumstances and those of many of her more privileged peers was so intolerable that it compelled her to dissociate from certain places and people. Her social isolation and that of the other participants, while it may not have affected school-related behaviors and performance, nevertheless impacted their social experiences within school.

While these participants’ social isolation parallels the many students of the incarcerated reflected in the literature discussed in Chapter Two, what is perhaps particular to the students of this research is that their social isolation has been limited to the social environments of educational spaces, rather than to their academic capacity within these spaces. Although these students’ exceptional academic talents perhaps insulated them from a direct educational impact of parental incarceration, however, social isolation did nevertheless have collateral consequences that have weighed on these students’ educational experiences. Blue illuminates this indirect effect of social isolation on education:

I think that my father's incarceration, because I didn't open up to people about it,... I didn't have people to move through that experience with, so then I felt really isolated, and I think... [Sighs] that was emotionally harmful, psychologically harmful for me. And so, to a certain extent, being able to detach from my emotions allowed me to operate as some sort of workhorse and do really well academically, but then not in life-sustaining ways. Yeah, it was at the cost of feeling like I wanted to die."

Blue succinctly captures how, in spite of extraordinary academic performance, social isolation can have life-threatening effects, as three participants explicitly alluded to their own suicidal ideation. Thus,
although the students of this sample and other university students of the incarcerated may be perceived by educators as high-functioning, independent learners with profound educational success, their self-sufficiency cannot be mistaken for their not needing support or help. Thankfully, these students have been able to subvert the perils of social isolation well enough to preserve their academic performance and enroll in an highly selective institution of higher education. However, the long-term effects of social isolation weigh on many of these students’ psyches in such a way that jeopardizes their overall wellness. Although this weight may not manifest itself in the externalizing forms of school dropout, absenteeism, or misbehavior in the ways that are captured in the literature, the internalizing effects of this social isolation and independence can be similarly as damaging and cannot be ignored.

Using Experience to Inform Future Aspirations

While the aforementioned results relate directly to students’ experiences of matriculation into and retention while within college, reviewing these students’ visions for themselves beyond college also informed the original research questions of this study. Specifically, an analysis of how participating students framed their aspirations for their futures revealed a critical understanding of these students’ psychological makeup that, again, contrasts with common findings in the literature. Previous research has highlighted students’ diminished capacity to succeed in school following the incarceration of a parent and associated limited economic earning potential in adulthood, and none of this research examined the career choices of children of the incarcerated (Western & Pettit, 2010; Murphey & Cooper, 2015; Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016). Many students in this sample, alternatively, not only used their parents’ incarcerations as a motivator of positive academic achievement, but also allowed parental incarceration and its symptomatic adversities to inform future career aspirations that center around improving the lives of others. Nine of the twelve participants in this research explicitly shared that they intend to go into careers that will help other people. From doctors to human rights lawyers to criminal justice reformers to
mental health specialists, these nine students were inspired to serve people with similar backgrounds as themselves, in spite of the personal trauma associated with those who are served by many of these fields. In addition to navigating their own vested interests in improving the social good, nine students (seven of whom aspire towards social-impact careers) also found themselves grappling with the economic implications of their future careers. These students expressed that their primary goal, even stronger than that of serving the public interest, was to arrive at a position of financial security in which they will no longer have to persistently worry about money and/or provide financial support to their families. The following outlines how these students navigated the tension between social service aspirations and financial security considerations.

**Channeling Personal Adversity into Social Impact Aspirations.**

As previously mentioned, nine of the twelve participants expressed their desire to pursue a career that benefits the welfare of others. For some, this desire for social impact manifested itself on the individual level, as participants wanted to singularly touch the lives of others in order to make change. For instance, Briona, who expressed interest in making mental healthcare in rural communities more accessible, found herself grappling with the scale at which she wanted to promote access, ultimately deciding that the individual level best suited her skills and passions, hence her pursuit of a clinical psychology degree. Several other students wanted to become doctors in order to provide one-to-one care to people in need. Other students, however, had ambitious goals of advancing radical social change at systemic and institutional levels. Participant F2 described that, although she’s interested in delivering healthcare to people, she wants to do so at a systemic level that ameliorates inferior conditions for disadvantaged populations. She framed her career aspirations in reference to her first learning about disparities in the criminal justice system:
I think there's just so much about our [criminal justice] system in America that does need further exploration and research… I just know I really want to be able to give back in whichever way possible and help fix a lot of the problems we have in America. Definitely concerning, not even just in health and stuff, which is my main focus, but also in policy and how we treat different communities and stuff like that.

Some students found themselves in flux about whether they wanted to promote social good at the individual or institutional level, and found that university was a resource that facilitated their thinking about their career path. Kristoff, for example, described how the university provided him with a lot more information about the different avenues through which change can be made. Whereas, prior to college, he had exclusively wanted to be a doctor, “now that I'm at Stanford, I see that there's more opportunities and more things… I can do more.” He described how “the biggest goal or the most surreal one would be, like, antibiotic resistance or finding a way to cure Epstein-Barr virus which… causes mononucleosis, but it can also cause cancer, which was what happened to my grandma… My goal, I guess, in short, is to help people in the largest scale possible.” Prior to attending university, Kristoff had not envisioned for himself a world in which he could make change that impacted whole populations of people. Attending a highly selective university, however, provided him with a platform to understand that it was not only possible to create social change, but that he himself could initiate and contribute to such mass change.

Although this study does not afford evidence about a causal mechanism to explain why these students aspire towards social-impact careers, several students’ perceptions of why they have chosen the paths that they have prove significantly revealing. Four students in particular connected their intended career pathways to their personal traumas and experiences. Upon thoughtful self-reflection, Maria, for instance, explained that perhaps she wanted to be a doctor because of her family’s struggles during her childhood. "I'm wondering if [I want to be a doctor] because of all the sacrifice my mom went through to help me and my brother… how that's motivated me, even here [at college], to help others." Although not
previously at the forefront of her conscious, when asked why she wanted to be a doctor, Maria swiftly related her desire to heal others as a product of her mother’s unwavering efforts to heal her family in the face of her father’s absence to incarceration.

Both Ryan and participant F2 attributed their ambition for system-level change to their family being ensnared in the broken criminal justice system. When prompted to describe the relationship between their father’s incarceration and their higher education experience, Ryan said:

[My father’s incarceration] has really given me an interest in the whole system of the prison industry. And it's kind of prompted me to want to do things about actually taking action against that… I definitely imagine myself being an organizer in a big city, hopefully… I definitely want to do a lot of tangible grassroots work… [T]here's also the side of me that sees myself practicing civil rights law or something. But at this point it's definitely doing tangible work for issues that need to be talked about and action needs to be taken for.

Ryan’s observed silence on issues of incarceration and criminal justice in college have inspired them to pursue work related to the reform of a system that had a repeated negative effect on their life. Similarly, participant F2 drew connections between her lived experience and her aspirations. On the heels of discussing her growing up in a predominantly low-income community with a high concentration of racial minorities, she explained, “I definitely know I want to do some type of service… I always say I want to serve underserved communities… So,... right now, I've been focusing on mainly minority communities and low-income communities.” Thereafter, in reference to her becoming aware of her father’s incarceration, she made clear how, specifically, she wanted to serve those communities touched by incarceration, too: “I do know I want to do work within the criminal justice system.” By contextualizing her own experiences within the interlocuting institutions that have produced mass incarceration, she identified how her positionality both as a part of a family within the system and as a student with a selective education has equipped her for such work.
While Ryan and participant F2’s aspirations are explicitly related to their identities as children of incarcerated parents, other participants revealed how their ambitions are more so related to other parts of their identities. Briona’s interest in increasing access to mental healthcare within rural communities stems from her exposure to the deficiencies of these service within such areas growing up in a rural farming community: “I specifically care a lot about access to these resources in rural communities because it's one thing for it to be difficult to access because of your income, but it's, like, these things just don't exist in these areas for miles. And so,... that's something that I really care about,” she disclosed. Briona’s personal exposure to the lack of resources in these areas gave her the local knowledge to then want to address an otherwise overlooked problem amongst many of her Stanford peers.

**Grappling with the Profitability of Social Impact Aspirations.**

Although many students disclosed their intentions to pursue careers that impact the public good, students also expressed their desire and need to arrive at a point of financial security at which they would no longer have to worry about money and/or would be in a position to support their families financially. The ways in which participants expressed their desire for financial security, however, varied. One student, Maria, expressed that, given her family’s financial difficulties throughout her childhood, she wanted a life of wealth. Maria explained how this desire resulted from comparing her own childhood to that of her current significant other:

“[C]oming from a life that was very modest, [in which] I would come home, and we would have no electricity because my mom couldn't pay the light bill or having no water because she couldn't pay the water bill. And now having a boyfriend who has a lot of money,... after visiting his home and seeing what a beautiful life he lived, it was like, I want that for my life… So, I see myself having the opposite of what I had… I see myself hopefully wealthy.”
Initially, Maria was interested in doing public service work in medical clinics in developing regions, citing her satisfaction with the modest lifestyle entailed by such work. However, her recognition of how her upbringing did not have the financial privileges and advantages conferred by most of her college peers moved her to want to pursue a more lucrative medical career.

Most students, on the other hand, while longing to live a life of financial security, remained very modest in their financial aspirations. “I don't need some massive house or anything like that... I just want to feel financially secure, whatever that looks like,” said Briona, encapsulating most student’s desire to live comfortably but not exorbitantly. Five students framed their goal of financial security in terms of themselves. “I want to worry less about finances, definitely. ‘Cause I think it's something that's constantly on my mind, even in the back of my mind when I'm not doing anything. ‘Cause it's not something that I can just, you know, ignore,” admitted Jenna. She and four additional students described the personally tormentative reality of being financially insecure and framed their future lifestyle aspirations as absent any looming threat of financial instability within their own consciousness.

Four students framed their financial goals as in the best interest of their families, wanting to minimize the amount of hard work that their families, namely their mothers, have to endure. “I just want to give back to my mom... Just making sure she never has to work again or she never has to struggle,” said participant M2 when asked what he envisions for his future. Similarly, when describing his goals for going to college in the first place, Kristoff said “[M]y primary goal was to help support my family financially. It's still my primary goal is to make sure my mom isn't losing the house or things like that. I really want to take them out of poverty. I mean, single-handedly, I just want to do that. So badly.” These two men and two other participants articulated a certain striving to ameliorate the conditions that their families’ were subjected to in their childhoods. They acknowledged how hard their mothers – who were their primary caregivers when their fathers were incarcerated – worked and displayed the utmost resiliency in carrying the family through adversity. As such, given their opportunities conferred by an
education at a highly selective university, the participants conveyed an obligation to repay their mothers for their struggles and minimize any future challenges.

One of those not necessarily interested in social impact work, Blue, nevertheless had to consider how her career ambitions in art practice could become lucrative: “If I am interested in pursuing some sort of art practice, academia is a stable way to do that just because you're able to get funding and have housing, and it's not easy to sustain yourself as a artist,” Blue outlined. Although academia was not necessarily the field that she seemed most excited about, it is the one that guarantees her ability to pursue her passion while also ensuring financial stability. While Blue does not have the same direct service aspirations as other participants, her aspirations neatly summarize how students have to make sense of their creative and social-impact passions while also grappling with social and financial ascension from the circumstances of their childhoods.

**Discussion: The Relation Between Lived Experience and Career Decisions.**

Although literature about how children of incarcerated parents approach employment and career choices was nonexistent at the time of this study, turning to that literature about other underrepresented students’ career choices helps to better understand the future aspirations of those participants involved in this study. For example, a study of Native American students in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) college majors found a significant prominence of communal, rather than individualistic, work goals amongst participants, particularly among those students raised in tribal communities (Smith, Cech, Metz, Huntoon, & Moyer, 2014). That is, Native students’ aspirations primarily centered around serving and caring for others, working with people, and bettering their own communities or humanity, generally, rather than the individualistic values of power, money, and prestige typically associated with STEM careers. Native students who grew up on or near reservations were more likely than white students
to want to use their education to serve their communities but also were more likely to feel a sense of social isolation both within their academic majors and college at large. The children of incarcerated parents in this study who aspire towards social impact careers have similarly centered communal work goals in their career aspirations, desiring to help their families, their local communities, and related communities, at large. Although the historical and systematic differences that have repressed indigenous students are vastly different than those that have impacted children of incarcerated parents, both Native students and students of incarcerated parents are statistically disadvantaged in educational environments relative to their more privileged peers; experience high rates of poverty; face unique barriers to academic achievement within the traditional public education system; and experience social isolation in educational environments. Thus, those theories used to explain Native students’ experiences in STEM career proved valuable when rationalizing how the students of this study framed their career goals.

That one’s academic and career aspirations are believed to align with their personal values is known as goal congruence, a term often used in cost accounting but that has begun to frequent educational psychology discourse (Smith, Cech, Metz, Huntoon, & Moyer, 2014, p. 414). Goal congruency theory in education posits that such an alignment between passion and practice results not only in heightened motivation but also in heightened performance. When students’ academic responsibilities are not congruent with their personal values, however, their academic motivation and performance tend to diminish. Goal congruency theory perhaps then well explains how the students with histories of parental incarceration in this study have been able to persist in high school, the college application process, and their elite higher education experiences. While a causal mechanism cannot be drawn conclusively, goal congruency theory suggests that, in addition to their positive construal of their parents’ incarcerations, these students’ conviction that their most desirable career would involve improving the lives of others – while of differing scales and through differing mechanisms – has informed their academic drive and achievement.
While goal congruence helps to make sense of how these students came to both use their personal experience to inform their career aspirations and channel the alignment of the two towards their academic performance, the communal-individualistic binary of goal congruence ignores how these students’ desire for financial security may, too, serve a collective goal. Whereas individualistic goals are typically considered those that emphasize agency, independence, and the accrual of money and power, these students strive for a financial standing, self-sufficiency, and mobility that will allow them to better support and uplift their families and communities (Smith, Cech, Metz, Huntoon, & Moyer, 2014). Individualistic goals as conventionally defined in the literature therefore misrepresent how goals that may propel the self to success or prestige can simultaneously and unequivocally serve a communal interest. Thus, these students’ seemingly contradictory efforts to work for social change while also remaining financially lucrative are indeed harmoniously congruent aspirations.
Chapter Five
Conclusion

My goal of this thesis was to understand what Stanford students with histories of parental incarceration understand and believe about their experiences of success in higher education, despite the circumstances and research that predict their failure, in order to reveal initial insights about how researchers and practitioners may be able to better structure the learning environments of children of the incarcerated to promote their readiness for and representation in higher education. And yet, I must acknowledge that the results that I produced focused on individual, personal facets of these students’ experiences. The narratives that informed the results of this study suggest that the twelve interview participants stand apart from those documented in the existing literature. Rather than exhibiting lower signs of school connectedness and engagement, these students have poured themselves into their school work and found solace in their studies (Murphey et al., 2015). Rather than demonstrating aggressive, externalizing behaviors in classrooms and succumbing to disproportionate disciplinary action with school officials, these students have exhibited an unwavering independence that has underscored their academic achievement (Jacobsen, 2015; Western & Pettit, 2010). Rather than facing repeated expulsions and dropping out of high school, these students not only attend a highly selective university, but have ambitious aspirations to affect change both in their local communities and society, broadly (Trice & Brewster, 2004; Cho, 2011). They are exceptions to the statistics that suggest their failure.

Although my results call attention to the individual tenacities of these participants, understanding the true implications of these twelve students’ exceptionalism requires a critique of that literature relative to which their extraordinariness is being measured. Overrepresented in the fields of developmental and social psychology, but also spanning sociology, the existing research has tried to analyze students of incarcerated parents behaviorally, developmentally, and cognitively. The research has made conjectures
about how we can develop these youth’s “potential resilience [emphasis mine]” and ability to measure up to a historical yardstick of educational success that was never standardized to accommodate the phenomenon of parental incarceration (Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016). Such social science approaches to understanding parental incarceration have overwhelmingly pathologized children and their families, attempting to make sense of how those affected by parental incarceration can be taught to better cope psychologically with the absence of a caregiver in school environments. The literature has formulated reactionary questions to students’ realities, asking, “How can schools and educators prevent this group’s truancy, dropout, and misbehavior?” rather than “How, in the wake of parental incarceration, can schools and educators create and promote an environment of collective healing in which children of incarcerated parents can grow and learn alongside their peers in the midst of an indisputably traumatic life event?” This literature has analyzed children of incarcerated parents as isolated individuals, distinctly apart from the general student body, who must, on their own volition, learn to function and achieve in spite of parental absence.

If I were to adhere to these existing social scientific approaches to studying children of incarcerated parents, I would conclude that the participating students did fulfill their resilience “potential” – potential that other children of incarcerated parents have either not capitalized upon or fully relinquished (Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016). I would conclude that these students developed their own social emotional learning capacities to equip themselves with the resources, knowledge, and motivation to matriculate and succeed in an exceedingly selective institution of higher education, while other students simply were not able to.

But to make such conclusions would be to blame the supposedly suboptimal social emotional capacities of the other millions of children of incarcerated parents on those children themselves and the communities that raise them. Such conclusions would ignore the threats to these children’s social emotional states in the first place – poverty, the racism of government disinvestment, violence, and so on
Research questions and results that center the discourse of resilience, of individuals’ capacities to manage and negotiate the harsh realities of the world, frequently reinstate principles of meritocracy that are only recently being critiqued in educational spaces (Rivers & Webster, 2018). Accordingly, if I was to draw conclusions about these study participants’ resiliencies, I would be suggesting that these students’ abilities to shoulder the stressors of parental incarceration warrants their success, while those students who did not achieve such excellence were incapable of honing their resilience, and are thus worthy of failure.

Such a conclusion obscures those realities of my participants’ lives that were omitted from the results chapter of this thesis: The ongoing and persistent realities of substance abuse, mental illness, gun violence, suicide, racism, mental institutionalization, residential instability, domestic violence, poverty, separation, despair, and loss that pervade these students lives, even as they are receiving a sunny-California Stanford education. These realities have constrained some students’ capacities to pass their classes, accompany their peers on social outings, feel a sense of belonging in their dorms and their majors, afford meals and books, respond to family emergencies, seek out the help that they believe their peers take for granted, etc. Thus, we cannot take these students’ achievements at face value, allowing only their positive life events and outcomes to represent them, or else we ignore that they are still negotiating the same pervasive structural barriers and threats that have rendered the achievement of many other children of the incarcerated – at least as defined by conventional definitions of school success – impossible.

The experience of interviewing and connecting with these participants revealed to me the necessity of analyzing their individual traits in order to meet the goals of my original research questions – to inform structural and environmental change. I therefore use their individual narratives and the continuities between them not to instruct what resiliencies other students of similar backgrounds should internalize and how they should achieve success, but rather to understand what exactly was burdened by
these participants in order for them to attain academic excellence and how we can displace those burdens onto their educational institutions and those academic environments of other children of incarcerated parents. Such an understanding can provide insights as to how we can improve educational institutions to better serve those students affected by parental incarceration. These understandings can inform the questions, which I enumerate below, necessary to identify the reforms, policies, interventions, and practices that will meaningfully and substantively improve outcomes for children of the incarcerated within these institutions.

To be clear, I use these students’ narratives about positive construal of parental incarceration, independence, and future aspirations to inform questions about policies and practices, not policies and practices themselves, because I, as an undergraduate student, am without the nuanced, refined knowledge that affects different localities and communities and therefore am not equipped to make concrete, generalized recommendations about policies. The needs of every student, community, and region are different, and thus effective response to parental incarceration will require different policies and practices in different places. The power of the questions produced by this thesis, however, is that they can ideally work hand-in-hand with policies and practices to formulate possibilities for effective responses to parental incarceration across students, communities, and regions, which is why I choose to frame my recommendations accordingly.

The participating students’ abilities to construe their parents’ incarcerations as something that could positively affect their education demonstrate how we may ask that educational support systems do the same. For instance, how could the statistical outcomes for children of the incarcerated be combatted if educational institutions could better recognize, adapt to, and accommodate the construal of adversity—specifically parental incarceration— as something from which students can learn and grown, something that can positively contribute to their academic success? If schools and education stakeholders were tasked with representing adversity as life events that are not sufficient to disrupt students’ educational
trajectories, then the burdensome responsibility of having to positively construe a life event that the learning environment and popular media presently tell us is reprehensible – that is, because of the criminality associated with incarceration – is taken off of the students whose loved ones are incarcerated. When students’ teachers and learning environments instill in them that incarceration is a part of a larger, albeit fractured system of criminal justice, then students are free to understand that the incarceration of their loved ones does not define nor confine them; they are free to have hope both in their own capacity for academic achievement and in their schools’ capacities to unequivocally, indiscriminately facilitate such achievement. Such hope is not only inspiring, but necessary for academic achievement and civic engagement (Ginwright, 2015, p. 4). And yet, at present, hope is a forgotten possibility for many youth in communities where incarceration is concentrated, eroded by discriminatory hiring practices, the perils of poverty, unaddressed police brutality, and community violence (Ginwright, 2015, p. 4). So, we must ask:

- How can elementary schools de-stigmatize and accommodate non-traditional parental arrangements in order to limit the social exclusion experienced by young children of incarcerated parents?
- How can educators and administrators at all tiers of the education system reverse the abundantly stigmatizing approach to interacting with children of the incarcerated?
- How can institutions of higher education honor and privilege the narratives of children of incarcerated parents in order to demonstrate that such narratives are represented and worthy of such representation in these institutions?

Moreover, we must ask those questions that address and inform the structural changes critical for the hope of children of the incarcerated and their families to flourish.

When we consider the twelve participants’ resolve for independence and consequential social isolation, we can similarly construct questions that may lead to the development of interventions and
policies that adequately address the needs of students with incarcerated parents and others facing adversity. For example, how can educators respect students’ rights to independence and self-autonomy, while making accessible the resources, people, and care that these students may need to fall back on in times of need? Such a question respects that students’ independence and agency are oftentimes survival and coping strategies that give them a source of efficacy in the face of adversity, whilst nevertheless acknowledging that students should not have to survive and cope in isolation. Similar questions can inform educational practices that respect students’ abilities to make decisions for themselves while simultaneously supplementing the dearth of resources and compassion extended to them in their times of need.

The participants’ alignment of their communal values to serve their multiple communities – their families, neighborhoods, cities, country, etc. – with their academic course of study also informs questions that expand the possibilities for children of the incarcerated and other relegated students. How can academic curriculums better reveal to students – not only those who are deemed “high-risk,” but also those with whom they share classrooms, teachers, and schools – systems of structural poverty and violence, as well as their own positions within such systems? How could such teachings embolden students to feel a sense of efficaciousness to resist and reform such systems at local levels and beyond? How can curriculums center students’ communities and values? How can these curriculums give students the opportunities to align their school work with the betterment of such communities and advancement of their own values, rather than those that schools presently attempt to standardize and instill across students? Questions such as these serve far more interests than only those of students of the incarcerated. If all students have opportunities to make congruent their schoolwork and their values/interests, then it is to be expected that all students at least have the opportunity for heightened school engagement and academic achievement (Smith, Cech, Metz, Huntoon, & Moyer, 2014).
My participants’ narratives allow us to envision the possibilities of how children of the incarcerated can be represented, of how they can measure up to the yardstick that quantifies American students’ success, one to which they’ve been expected to measure up to in preexisting research. The existing literature reveals how American education needs to be critiqued for failing a population of students whose needs and experiences are not captured solely by the established groups that are thought to merit extra consideration in education – that is, students coming from low socioeconomic, racial minority, English language learner, homeless, and foster care backgrounds. The twelve participants’ narratives, however, reveal and inform constructive, meaningful responses to those critiques and illuminate the questions that will give us answers as to how we can better institute support systems for children of the incarcerated and other students whose academic success has been encumbered by their parental status, socioeconomic status, race, etc. And when we use these students’ narratives not as models for other children of incarcerated parents to strive for, but as frameworks that forge meaningful, sustainable change within those bodies that systematize American education, we commit to shifting the locus of change from children of the incarcerated – who have already been burdened by the stigma, shame, isolation, financial instability, etc. that accompany a parent’s detainment – to the schools that have failed to educate these students as they struggle through such effects. As such, those bodies can begin to innovatively reform themselves to better resist the pervasive effects that a single incarceration can have on a student and that a whole system of incarceration can have on the U.S. public education system.

* * *

At the end of each interview that I conducted for this project, I thanked participants for their profound vulnerability and courage for coming forward to make this project possible. I told them that they
highly exemplify exactly what I was trying to demonstrate with this research – that is, contrary to the literature, children of the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated are a highly resilient population; we can transcend cycles of poverty and going back to jail and prison ourselves; and we deserve and can handle higher education just as much as any other student. While each interview was heartbreaking and emotional, I left each one always more inspired than I was discouraged. In spite of what some would consider debilitating, ongoing trauma and adversity, these students aspire towards PhDs, MDs, JDs, towards federal legislative reform, towards transformative social change that will render our country safer, healthier, and ridden with indiscriminate opportunity. I have no doubt that they will fulfill such aspirations.

However, in their interview, Ryan stated something that reminds us that we cannot let the successes of these students suggest that every child of an incarcerated parent(s) has the same opportunity to fulfill their aspirations. “In those spaces [of higher education],” they said, we need to “talk about, critically, the prison system, how it is, and what exactly that means for certain people.” Ryan reminds us that we cannot wholly improve educational opportunities for children of the incarcerated until we talk about the origins of parental incarceration itself and acknowledge the disparate manifestations of its effects. They call attention to how educational disparities and inequities are inextricably linked to other inequities and systems.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the epidemiological outbreak of parental absence due to jail and prison confinement was born out of an era of mass incarceration that took hold in the 1970s and has exploded rapidly ever since. From the various readings that I’ve done, conferences I’ve attended, and people with whom I’ve spoke, I’ve learned that parental incarceration and its perils are a state-sanctioned phenomena facilitated by the various bodies that make up the criminal justice system, as well as child welfare and social services agencies and schools. Parental separation is hardly a new trend in our country, however, and it is hardly isolated in the criminal justice system. It has legacies on the auction blocks of
the antebellum American South, where slave children were sold off separately from their parents, siblings, and extended kin, as well as in the forcible displacement of Native American children from their parents to government-backed assimilation boarding schools (King, 2011; Little, 2018). It takes form at the U.S.-Mexico border where thousands of migrant children are detained separately of their parents and other family members. Children have been wrongfully separated from their parents by police in New York City food stamp offices (Southall, 2018). Children have been removed by child welfare agencies that, rather than providing critical help to families, punitively deem those poor and working-class parents struggling to make do as “neglectful” (Lee, 2016).

The families who have have been affected by each of the aforementioned separation crises are overwhelmingly Black, Latino, and Native American. They are overwhelmingly living in crushing poverty under the confines of violent crime, inadequate access to and quality of housing, as well as underfunded and failing schools. We cannot deny that parental incarceration is heavily implicated in our oppressive and dysfunctional criminal justice system, which is not actually correcting crime rates nor reducing recidivism (Cullen, Jonson, & Nagin, 2011). But more broadly, parental incarceration is born out of a pervasive sentiment that certain people, as Ryan said – specifically poor people of color – are not worthy of remaining a family unit. This sentiment, as demonstrated above, pervades government institutions at the local, state, and federal levels. It is rooted in a hundreds-year history of state-sponsored systemic violence against and marginalization of people color in the United States, a history I encourage readers to take upon themselves to learn.

The educational opportunities of and outcomes for children of incarcerated parents cannot and will not be fully addressed until such a sentiment is abolished and eradicated from the bedrock of our governmental institutions. While schools and the education system can do their part to ameliorate the effects of parental incarceration – and we can in the meantime look to my twelve participants to inform such educational remedies – more importantly, there must be a commitment from each and every social,
political, and economic institution of our democracy if we are to truly begin to rectify the intergenerational effects of parental separation and preserve the unity of our nation’s most vulnerable families.

**Appendices**

Appendix A: Interest Form for Study about Parental Incarceration in Higher Education

I. For the purposes of this study, parental incarceration is defined as whether either or both of an individual's parents has spent any period in jail or prison during their own lifetime. Do you identify as being the child of a formerly or presently incarcerated parent?

II. Are you a Stanford student?

III. Are you willing to be contacted via email to schedule participation in a one-time, one-hour interview about your experiences in higher education?

IV. If your answered yes to the previous question, what is your name?

V. What is your email address?

VI. Questions or Comments

Appendix B

Demographic Survey

I. What is your name?

II. What is your age?

III. What is your class year?

IV. Please describe your gender.

V. What are your pronouns?

VI. Please describe your racial and/or ethnic identity.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol
I. To begin, can you please briefly describe your history with parental incarceration?
   A. Namely, which parent(s) was incarcerated, for how long, and during what period of your life?

II. In what ways did your parent’s incarceration have an effect on your school experiences prior to coming Stanford?
   A. Were there any factors that made these experiences difficult?
   B. Were there any services that or people who helped you with these experiences?

III. Did you apply to college right after high school? If not, why not?

IV. I now want to discuss your experiences applying to college. Can you please tell me a little bit about the steps you took to apply to college?
   A. If participant went directly from high school to Stanford:
      1. What were the factors you had to consider when deciding to apply to college?
      2. What services, if any, did your high school provide that helped you apply for college?
      3. Did you receive any services or do anything outside of school to prepare to apply to college? Please describe.
      4. How, if at all, did your community support you in the college application process?
      5. What were the challenges, if any, to the college application process?
      6. What factors, if any, do you think could have made your application to college easier?
   B. If participant did not go directly from high school to Stanford:
      1. What were the factors you had to consider when not going directly from high school to Stanford?
      2. What were the factors you had to consider when applying to Stanford?
      3. What factors, if any, supported you in the application process?
      4. How, if at all, did your community support you in the college application process?
      5. What were the challenges, if any, to the college application process?
      6. What factors, if any, do you think could have made your application to Stanford easier?

V. What were the factors you had to consider when transitioning to Stanford?

VI. Can you please tell me a little bit about your academic experiences at Stanford?
   A. What is your status as a student? Year? Major?
   B. What have you enjoyed? What factors or resources within and outside of the university have helped you academically?
   C. What has challenged you? What have been the obstacles within and outside of the university that have challenged you academically?
   D. What factors, if any, do you wish you could receive at Stanford to help you academically?

VII. In what ways, if any, has your parent’s incarceration affected your experiences at Stanford?
   A. Were there any factors that made these experiences difficult?
B. Were there any services that or people who helped you with these experiences?
C. What do you anticipate your experiences will be like beyond Stanford?

VIII. Is there anything you would like to add about your experiences in higher education or with the incarceration of your parent?

IX. Is there anything else I could have asked that would have helped me understand your experiences in higher education?
References


