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Motherhood Behind Bars: Motherhood, Identity, and Community in Prison

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Abstract

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Mass incarceration has dominated conversations about criminal justice in recent years. This is a critical social justice issue and given that the United States has a higher per-capita rate of incarceration than any other nation in the world, it is clear that the situation in the American criminal justice system is unique. However, women have been marginalized in the conversation about criminal justice reform because, as only 7% of the total incarcerated population, they are very much a minority. Hopefully this snapshot of motherhood in prison will begin to shed light on a particular experience of incarceration that has been sequestered to the margins of the criminal justice dialogue. Feministic jurisprudence and gender specific criminal justice issues must not be lost within the larger narrative of mass incarceration. This thesis is not one that is designed to fully and comprehensively explain the experience of motherhood in prison. Instead, what is offered here is a description of the lives of a few dozen women who were pregnant while incarcerated in the fall of 2016 at Helms Facility. These women are individuals with unique experiences who actively defy being type cast as the typical, American, pregnant convict. I hope only that I do the women of Helms justice in retelling their experiences and that this thesis may help to unpack the trope that exists within American culture of a “convict.” This thesis seeks to shed light on the experience of motherhood in prison and how the identity of motherhood is constructed while a woman is incarcerated. This idea is incredibly broad, and it would be impossible to understand the construction of motherhood in prison without understanding many pieces that act synergistically to form this identity. These elements include the physical realities of being incarcerated, the life histories of women before they interact with the criminal justice

system, the formation of individual identity, and the cultural conception of what it means to be a good mother, to name some of the most essential.

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1. Introduction

In the fall of 2016, I began working as a teacher for Motherhood Beyond Bars.

Motherhood Beyond Bars is an organization that has been working to teach prenatal classes to pregnant women at Helms Facility, a state run prison in metro-Atlanta. Their website states that, “Motherhood Beyond Bars works to improve the holistic health of incarcerated pregnant women, new mothers, and their children through health education, counseling, and services. We envision a world where incarceration is not a sentence to poor health for women and their children” - a noble vision indeed. The course is composed of nine lessons, and one lesson is taught weekly on Friday afternoons. The curriculum covers some critical health topics; lessons include: basic anatomy, recognizing complications, the process of labor and delivery, the importance of diet and exercise, and many other topics that are central to good health outcomes for pregnant women and their babies.

I worked with Motherhood Beyond Bars for 12 weeks; however, my role there was frequently fraught with complications and often fluctuated depending on the week and which one of my co-teachers was present. I began to teach with Motherhood Beyond Bars not only because the mission of the organization was one that resonated with me but also because I hoped to be able to learn something about the experience of motherhood and pregnancy in prison.

Unfortunately, I quickly learned that the roles of teacher approved to teach prison-institution sanctioned material and observer trying to understand the embodied experience of pregnancy in prison do not mesh well. However, the nature of the conflicts that arose when attempting to navigate these two opposing roles was informative in and of itself.

When I began to work with Motherhood Beyond Bars, I did not enter the prison with a distinct question I wanted to understand. My hope was not that I would uncover ethnographic data that would help me define the experience of motherhood in prison. The most essential reason for this is that the scope of research that can be done with pregnant people that are incarcerated is, as it should be, incredibly limited. As one of the most protected populations that exists within the domain of human subjects research, this was not a population that I would have been approved to study in a traditional research intensive way. The second reason why I did not seek to answer a specific question about motherhood in prison was because I truly did not know what I did not know. My personal learning curve throughout this process was steep, and my understanding of life in prison was reshaped each week. A question based on so little knowledge of the realities of prison life and institutional regulations would have been misguided and non-specific. As a result of both the policies that are in place to protect pregnant, incarcerated research subjects and the dearth of scholarly knowledge that exists about the experiences of pregnant women in prison, what follows here is necessarily anecdotal and reflexive.

This thesis seeks to shed light on the experience of motherhood in prison and how the identity of motherhood is constructed while a woman is incarcerated. This idea is incredibly broad, and it would be impossible to understand the construction of motherhood in prison without understanding many pieces that act synergistically to form this identity. These elements include the physical realities of being incarcerated, the life histories of women before they interact with the criminal justice system, the formation of individual identity, and the cultural conception of what it means to be a good mother, to name some of the most essential. This thesis

is not an exhaustive exploration of these topics due to limits in terms not only of time but also in terms of access: a conflict that will be more fully explored throughout the body of this text.

To begin this analysis it is important to have a sense of who is incarcerated and why. The life histories of women who are incarcerated are essential to identity formation while incarcerated. However, the format of the classes at Helms and institutional stipulations about one on one conversations limited the ability to learn about individual life histories. Subsequently, chapter two will paint in broad strokes to describe the average population of incarcerated women: demographic information, health information, notable changes in the population in recent years, and basic aspects of the criminal justice system. These are a handful of essential elements one must have knowledge of in order to understand the experiences that likely preceded incarceration for this group of women.

Chapter three will then discuss myself as an instrument of investigation. Throughout this project my own positionality was relatively essential to the type of information that I learned and focused on during discussion with the women in class. It became clear that my own obligations as a teacher, to provide information and to learn about issues I did not at first know the answers to, subsumed my ability to act as an objective observer. I was also rather quickly censored in terms of the type of information I was allowed to share and the scope of my practice as a teacher; the nature of this conflict is telling and will be explored more fully in chapter three and threaded throughout later chapters.

Chapter four will focus on daily life for the women who participated in this class. This prison was quite unique because it was specifically a medical prison where incarcerated people who had a health concern were housed in order to, theoretically, have better access to appropriate

medical care. While much of the prison was cordoned off from my purview as a volunteer, any details that were shared with me about daily life in prison will be explained in this chapter. Daily life is something that is far from within the control of the women who are incarcerated at Helms. Thus, it is essential to highlight some structures here that necessarily control the decisions and health of the women incarcerated at Helms. Paul Farmer's analysis of structural violence will prove quite illustrative in this case. Having developed a sense of the access I was able to have and the scope of this project coupled with some basics about daily life, chapter five moves into the realm of more theoretical constructions of identity formation while incarcerated.

In order to know how a woman may understand herself as a person in prison, it is necessary to understand how power dynamics are enacted while incarcerated. Power can be expressed in many ways, however chapter five specifically discusses the interactions that occur between women and the correctional officers who supervise them. It would be foolish to assume that other interpersonal dynamics and social structures do not also exert power upon women who are incarcerated while pregnant. Throughout our class, a space in which discussions always took place publicly in the presence of other women, the role of social structure amongst the women themselves was not a topic of conversation. However, the impact that correctional officers had on the lived experiences of these women was impossible to ignore and often dominated class discussions that I was allowed to facilitate. In order to contextualize some of these experiences within the domain of anthropological scholarship, I will turn to Gail Caputo's ethnography, *A Half Way House for Women: Oppression and Resistance*. Her work parsing the manifestations of patriarchal social control in a somewhat coercive environment of a half-way house works well to contextualize the stories I was told about prisoner-guard interactions.

Having begun to unpack the ways in which power is exerted in prison, chapter six works to untangle the building blocks of individuality and community for this group of women. These two concepts work along a spectrum in this context with the primacy of individuality often being directly contrasted to notions of collectivity or community. The dialectic that exists between community and individuality in prison for this group of women was influenced by a confluence of factors that are highly specific to the stigma associated with being pregnant in prison. The simple fact of being incarcerated fundamentally alters the ways in which a woman can perceive of herself as a mother. Despite circumstances that actively work to diminish agency women at Helms still find ways to define themselves and exert agency. Caputo's theoretical model of resistance and individuality will be utilized here to help contextualize identity formation and individuality.

Chapter seven will work to integrate these concepts together to form a sketch of motherhood in prison. Stigma, individuality, community, power, and health concerns, to enumerate a few elements, interact to form a complex identity for incarcerated pregnant mothers. A particularly useful framework for understanding the environment in which these identities intersect can be adapted from the theoretical modeled offered by Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg in their ethnography, *Righteous Dopefiend*, which focuses on a community of injection drug users. Their theory of Lumpen Abuse and analysis of the dialectic that exists between structure and agency for all people lend themselves particularly well to synthesizing the experience of motherhood in prison as it was explained to me by the women who participated in class.

Mass incarceration has dominated conversations about criminal justice in recent years. This is a critical social justice issue and given that the United States has a higher per-capita rate of incarceration than any other nation in the world, it is clear that the situation in the American criminal justice system is unique. However, women have been marginalized in the conversation about criminal justice reform because, as only 7% of the total incarcerated population, they are very much a minority. Hopefully this snapshot of motherhood in prison will begin to shed light on a particular experience of incarceration that has been sequestered to the margins of the criminal justice dialogue. Feministic jurisprudence and gender specific criminal justice issues must not be lost within the larger narrative of mass incarceration. This thesis is not designed to fully and comprehensively explain the experience of motherhood in prison. Instead, what is offered here is a description of the lives of a few dozen women who were pregnant while incarcerated in the fall of 2016 at Helms Facility. These women are individuals with unique experiences who actively defy being type cast as the typical, American, pregnant convict. I hope only that I do the women of Helms justice in retelling their experiences and that this thesis may help to unpack the trope that exists within American culture of a “convict.”

2. Who is Incarcerated and Why?

A. The American Criminal Justice System

In daily life, we do not often think about prisoners, jails, or the Department of Corrections. We have relegated correctional facilities to the outskirts of society both physically, with respect to their locations, and within the framework of our minds. However, while society has done its best to make the prison system an, “out of sight, out of mind” situation, for a rapidly growing minority, incarceration is something that cannot be ignored. As the prison system begins to sweep up more and more women, it is essential to assess the suitability of the correctional facilities designed for men that now house thousands of women. In their handbook on Women and Imprisonment, the UN states that, “although research is unanimous in underlining the particularly detrimental effects of prison on women, their special needs are rarely taken into consideration during imprisonment” (United Nations, p. 3, 2015). It is of particular importance to ensure that these systems are making changes to address the specific needs of women due to the increasing rate of incarcerated pregnant women. There is an enormous range of issues for pregnant women in prison, ranging from the policy level to daily hygiene and stress. In order to design and implement policy that best promotes the health and well being of incarcerated pregnant women, it is essential to understand the demographics of this population, the impact of incarceration, and the reality of their lived experiences.

Of primary importance to understanding incarceration in America is knowledge of who is incarcerated and why. However, before delving into who composes America’s incarcerated populace, it is necessary to understand what is meant by the criminal justice system and how this system has a much more broad reach than one might at first expect. All together, there are

roughly 1.2 million women currently engaged with the American criminal justice system (The Sentencing Project, 2015). The criminal justice system can be broken down into three major branches: prisons, jails, and the system of probation and parole. A prison can be either a state run or a federal facility and is a space designated for people that have been convicted of a crime who are expected to serve sentences of at least a year. A jail is always a state run facility and has a much broader scope. A jail can house people convicted of crimes with rather short sentences, people on trial, and people awaiting bail. In essence, any one who is not released from the criminal justice system is likely housed in a jail. The last category of criminal justice system engagement is those who are on probation or have been released on parole. Of the roughly 1.2 million women currently engaged with the criminal justice system, 106,232 are in prisons, both federal and state; 109,100 are in jails; 966,029 are currently on probation; 102,825 have been released on parole (Kaeble & Bonczar, 2017); (Minton & Zeng, 2015).

Whenever possible, the type of correctional facility will be specified here when discussing data and trends in the criminal justice system. However, throughout much of the literature these terms are used without attention to their relative specificity, compromising the ability to make comparisons between state, federal, and local systems of incarceration. Additionally many of the more robust and well executed efforts at data collection and change analyses are done over the course of 8-10 years; as a result, the majority of the data that is currently available and used here is predicated upon a population that was incarcerated in the mid 2000s. The differences in these categories are also critical to attend to because different organizations are responsible for collecting data on jails and prisons at various levels; this means that data collection, reporting style, and methodology may vary substantially, creating a

significant degree of heterogeneity in the organization and accuracy of the information that is publicly available.

Probation and parole as concepts are theoretically useful alternatives to incarceration in a prison or jail. Any system of supervision that allows a person to remain in his or her community, connected to family, friends, and employment opportunities should certainly be supported and encouraged. However, probation and parole as they are currently implemented in the United States pose an undue burden to those who are subjected to their rules and regulations. The National Research Council found that while most conditions appear technically feasible, collectively the rigidity of many regulations almost guarantees non-adherence (2008). An example of the ways in which the normal conditions of probation can quickly become unwieldy can be found in chapter three.

Parole and probation, while frequently lumped together, are two distinct categories. The term parole can be defined as, “releasing offenders from a correctional institution, after they have served a portion of their sentence, under the continued custody of the state and under conditions that permit their reincarceration in the event of a violation of the terms of parole, which may not otherwise be a criminal offense” (National Research Council, p. 9, 2008). Alternatively, probation refers to, “a court ordered period of correctional supervision in the community, generally as an alternative to incarceration” (Kaeble & Bonczar, 2016). However, what these two systems of community supervision share is that they are both considered conditional, and a person under the supervision of these systems is subject to incarceration at any time should they violate the conditions of their parole or probation.

Within one year of release, an estimated 14% of people on parole or probation will be re-incarcerated (Kaeble & Bonczar, 2016). However, this figure is quite low in comparison to the rate of re-incarceration when one expands the time frame of analysis. Within three years, fully two-thirds of people who have been released from prison on parole are rearrested and just over half are returned to prison (National Research Council, 2008). It is instructive to keep in mind this number does not consider people who are originally put on probation after sentencing and those who were incarcerated in local jails as opposed to prisons. It is worth noting that the Bureau of Justice Statistics does not make the rate of reincarceration for longer time periods publicly available. One can only find the data suggestive of the notion that over the course of three years one is more likely to be reincarcerated than not from privately researched data sources.

The terms of probation or parole are frequently quite similar. They often include mandatory reporting to a probation or parole officer, finding and maintaining gainful employment, not using drugs or alcohol, not associating with other people with criminal records¹, and, perhaps most importantly, paying all of the fees associated with supervision and restitution (National Research Council, 2008). While these conditions may perhaps seem reasonable to an outside observer of the criminal justice system, they in fact represent enormous burdens to those who must adhere to these stipulations. Many of these stipulations will be contextualized within the context of post-incarceration release and motherhood later. For present purposes, it is important to understand that a significant number of women find themselves

¹ When one considers that 1 in 3 black men will be incarcerated in his life time, the unfeasibility of not associating with other people convicted of crimes in the most heavily policed areas emerges quite clearly (The Sentencing Project, 2017). The same is true for children of incarcerated parents who are significantly more likely to be incarcerated themselves (The Sentencing Project, 2012).

incarcerated in a jail or prison simply because of parole or probation violations that would not otherwise be considered a crime at all.

B. The War on Drugs and Changing Demographics

The American prison system is currently attempting to handle a larger population of female prisoners and a faster growing rate of female incarceration than ever before (The Sentencing Project, 2015). In fact between 1980 and 2014, the number of incarcerated women increased by more than 700% (The Sentencing Project, 2015). In that same time period, the number of women in prison has been increasing at a rate 50% higher than men (The Sentencing Project, 2017). However, the prison population is not larger than ever before because of normal population growth within America. The prison population, particularly the female prison population, has been growing at a rate that massively outpaces population growth in the past few decades. The more than 700% increase in the total female prison population, from 26,378 in 1980 to 215,322 in 2014 has not happened uniformly across the female American population (The Sentencing Project, 2015). In an era of mass incarceration, Black and Latinx Americans have been swept into the criminal justice system at substantially higher rates than have Caucasian and non-Hispanic white Americans (Alexander, 2010).

In 2000, Black women were incarcerated at a rate that was six times higher than that of non-hispanic white women (Mauer, 2013). However, there have been notable and dramatic shifts in the racial disparities present in the female prison population over the course of the past fifteen years. By 2009, the discrepancy between the rates of incarceration for black women and white women had decreased 53% and was down to a ratio of 2.8:1 (Mauer, 2013). This figure is still

certainly not reflective of the American population at large, but it does indicate significant changes in the types of women who are more frequently finding themselves embattled with the criminal justice system. While women still constitute only 7% of the total prison population, the total number of women incarcerated in that same 2000-2009 time period increased 21.6% (Mauer, 2013). Given that the racial composition of incarcerated women changed so significantly while the total number of incarcerated women continued to increase, it is clear that more and more frequently white women are being arrested for and convicted of crimes.²

Although relatively paradoxical, the same laws that initially created the enormous racial disparities in the American criminal justice system are responsible for this slow but steady increase in white incarceration as well. The literature on incarceration consistently points back to the early 1970s as being the starting point for the skyrocketing rates of imprisonment in the United States (Alexander, 2010). The “War on Drugs” is specifically identified as the root cause of mass incarceration because of the way it was implemented in three major ways. First, the War on Drugs ushered in a series of laws regarding mandatory minimum sentencing and “get tough initiatives” (Alexander, 2010). These laws enacted zero tolerance policies and resulted in a minimum amount of jail time even for possession of very small quantities of drugs. These laws were supported by the second major leg of the War on Drugs: a dramatic uptick in the policing and enforcement of drug related crimes. Collectively, harsher drug laws and more expansive law enforcement should have by themselves increased the prison population. However, the third arm of the War on Drugs was its manipulation of these new laws that, with almost surgical precision,

²The data available from the FBI and the BJS classify race and ethnicity differently and aggregate data by race or by gender but rarely by both, creating some serious flaws in the available data. Additionally the way race was classified was changed by the BJS in 2010 making longitudinal data for the past 6 years incompatible with previous years analyses.

targeted communities of color (Alexander, 2010). While, as a widespread social justice issue, the significance of the racial disparities created by the War on Drugs cannot be emphasized enough, for present purposes it is the changing racial composition that is more illustrative than the absolute difference in numbers of incarcerated women by race.

As indicated by the dramatic change in the racial composition of incarcerated women between 2000 and 2009, more and more white women are becoming involved in the criminal justice system. There are three potential reasons why this trend may have emerged: first, actual changes in the demographic population at large may be reflected in the subset of the prison population; second, there may have been significant changes in various state criminal justice policies that have led toward a more equal racial balance in prison. However, the most likely explanation is that there has been a change in the demographics of actual crime. In the nine-year period at hand, the number of white women who are incarcerated increased 48.4% (Mauer, 2013). This coincided with a national trend: a significant increase in the use of methamphetamine and prescription opioids (Mauer, 2013). As is true of many drugs, methamphetamine and prescription opioids are racialized drugs and are in fact used disproportionately by white people (Mauer, 2013). The combined effect of a crack-down on methamphetamine use along with the mandatory minimum sentencing laws of the 1970s might very well be the reason for this unexpected and dramatic change in the female prison population in the last two decades.

Increased rates of methamphetamine and opioid use draw attention to another host of socioeconomic conditions emerging over the past two decades. Between 1990 and 2008 the life expectancy at birth for white women without a college degree decreased by nearly five years (MFRNAS, 2012). This bears relevance for the current understanding of the criminal justice

system because, “many of the socioeconomic factors that contribute to lower life expectancy are also associated with high rates of criminal behavior” (Mauer, p. 9, 2013). The overlapping factors between lower life expectancy and criminal behavior include substance abuse and tobacco use, limited access to healthcare, limited ability to manage stress and chronic illness, poverty, and high levels of unemployment (MFRNAS, 2012). The links between low socioeconomic status and criminal behavior are critical because they are reflective of the types of crime that women typically commit, which are non-violent, property crimes, drug offenses, and crimes of survival (Mauer, 2013).

Compared to men, women are significantly more likely to be sent to prison for parole violations, minor drug crimes, or petty theft (National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women, 2016). This is perhaps best exemplified by the fact that between 1986 and 1999 the number of women incarcerated for drug related offenses rose 888% while those incarcerated for non-drug related offenses rose only 129% (NRCJIW, 2016). Rising arrest rates are compounded by an inability to afford the costs associated with criminal justice system engagement. In an investigation into the United States justice system, the United Nations found that with respect to female inmates, many of them are incarcerated simply because of an inability to pay fines related to parole and probation (United Nations, 2015). There are certainly women who do commit violent crimes; however, the vast majority of women in prison do not pose a violent threat to society.

The War on Drugs served not only to increase the number of people in prison, but it also significantly lengthened the average sentence a person could expect to serve. In 1986 a person incarcerated for a felony drug offense could expect to spend about 22 months in prison. By 2004

the expected sentence for the same category of offense had risen to 62 months (The Sentencing Project, 2017) This increase in the amount of time women are spending in jail can largely be attributed to mandatory minimum sentences for drug related offenses (Lynch et al, 2012). Unfortunately, perhaps the most alarming fact about the rising number of women who are spending substantial periods of time incarcerated is that the rate of pregnant women in prisons and jails is rising rapidly as well. Currently, estimates of the number of women who are pregnant when entering prison or jail vary between 6% to 10% (Committee on Health Care for Underserved Women, 2011); (Clarke et. al, 2006). This notably excludes the number of women who are pregnant when sentenced to probation who are at constant risk of becoming incarcerated while pregnant.

C. Health and Wellbeing for Incarcerated Pregnant Women

Pregnant women clearly have a unique set of healthcare needs, and it is essential to contextualize these needs with the implications of incarceration in mind. Within systems of incarceration in general, mental health emerges as a massively burdensome yet critically under-resourced issue. The mental health of pregnant women and new mothers is critical to protect and promote even when a woman is not incarcerated; however, the simple act of being incarcerated is in itself a barrier to positive mental health. It is increasingly being considered best practice to ask about issues pertaining to mental health, including questions about domestic or intimate partner violence, history of substance misuse, and other stressful life events during prenatal check-ups (Committee on Health Care for Underserved Women, 2011).

Within the realm of incarcerated healthcare, the significance of mental health history is not considered a primary concern. The lack of resources dedicated to promoting positive mental well being for women who are incarcerated while pregnant is problematic for a handful of reasons. The most immediate concern is that this is a primary medical need that should be attended to because existing in a state of poor mental health is not a condition of any sentence. Additionally, a growing body of research suggests that this dearth of resources has long term implications because a woman's mental health has significant implications for fetal development and the health of the infant after delivery (Committee on Health Care for Underserved Women, 2011; Clarke et al, 2006; Stewart et al, 2003).

While it should seem clear that a woman's mental health deserves to be protected in its own right, more often than not, the focus is primarily on changing the physical health indicators of the baby (Mukherjee, 2014). This is particularly true for women whom society considers criminals deserving of punishment. The change in master status from soon-to-be mother to convicted criminal in itself can have adverse effects on the mental well being of incarcerated women (United Nations, 2015). While investigating this issue in the United States criminal justice system, the United Nations found that, "the sudden change of their role from caregiver to 'criminal' and isolation from loved ones usually has an intensely adverse affect on their mental well being" (United Nations, p. 12, 2015). Unfortunately, the pregnant prison population is one of the most vulnerable populations in America, and they are extremely susceptible to mental health struggles.

Long before incarcerated women arrive at a correctional facility, their mental health is in jeopardy. The Bureau of Justice Assistance found that at the time of incarceration, 73% of the

women had symptoms of a current untreated mental health problem that would most likely remain untreated throughout their time behind bars (Lynch et al, 2014). The vast majority of female inmates report having experienced serious mental illness, (including depression, bipolar disorder, or other psychotic disorders), post-traumatic stress disorder, or a substance abuse disorder within the twelve months before being incarcerated (Lynch et al, 2012). Substance abuse disorders emerge as particularly problematic for this population with 82% of women in prison meeting the lifetime criteria for drug or alcohol dependence, a mental illness that can be a life long struggle even when a woman is given the proper treatment and all the support she may need (Lynch et al, 2012). Specifically for pregnant women, the estimate for history of substance abuse disorders within a year of incarceration is approximately 60% (Mukherjee, 2014). It is frequently theorized that the usually high rates of substance abuse disorders among women who are incarcerated is related to the equally remarkable rates of previously physical or sexual abuse and trauma experience by this population (Lynch et al, 2012).

Trauma, substance abuse, and incarceration interact to generate a particularly pernicious cycle with important implications for the well being of incarcerated women. Girls and young women who experience high levels of interpersonal violence are substantially more likely to engage in behaviors that may lead to incarceration. This is evidenced by the fact that girls hurt by sexual violence are 3 times more likely to develop psychiatric disorders or alcohol and drug abuse in adulthood, than girls who are not sexually abused (Day et al, 2003). In fact, the most significant risk factor leading to a girl under eighteen being placed in the juvenile justice system is a history of sexual abuse (Castro & Posadas, 2003). While the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems have substantial and important differences, the relationship between sexual abuse

and incarceration is well exemplified by the fact that 73% of girls in the juvenile justice system report a history of sexual abuse (Rebeca Project for Human Rights, 2007). Given the strong tie between substance abuse and traumatic experiences, it is reasonable to assert that in the absence of gender based violence, the rate of women incarcerated because of the criminalization of substance abuse would be dramatically lower.

In the rare case that a woman is actually incarcerated for a violent crime, a substantial percentage of the time the victim of the crime was someone who had physically or emotionally abused the woman in the past (Banks, 2003). When considering the case of pregnant women in prison, it should be of primary concern to healthcare providers to understand the nature of the relationship between a woman and the father of her child. The emotional burden of carrying the child of a man who had physically, emotionally, or sexually abused a woman while she is incarcerated is incalculable and deserves specific and dedicated resources in order to help a woman cope with such an unimaginable difficulty. While such information may not always be freely offered, as it was not for the research that follows here, women in prison collectively would benefit from healthcare providers that understand the majority of women in prison have extensive experiences of physical and sexual abuse.

Once within the prison system, the mental health challenges for pregnant women only grow. Despite the exceptionally high prevalence of substance abuse disorders within the prison population, most prisons do not have any sort of substance abuse rehabilitation or treatment centers (NWLC, 2010). Research on the handful of facilities that do offer rehabilitation, such as 12 step programs, has documented dramatically lower recidivism rates compared to those correctional facilities that do not have similar programs (Gido & Dalley, 2009). The logic is that

incarcerating a person has the effect of cutting him or her off from alcohol or illicit substances. However, this is not always the case. Regardless, simply being cut off from drugs or alcohol is not treatment, and the Department of Corrections is currently neglecting a significant window of opportunity to help lower the rates of drug related crimes while substantially improving the health of incarcerated people (NWLC, 2010). In addition to a high number of pregnant women having untreated substance abuse disorders, there are exceptionally high rates of untreated anxiety disorders and depression in correctional facilities (Mukherjee, 2014).

A great deal of clinical research has shown that maternal stress, anxiety, and depression are strongly linked to increased rates of miscarriage, preterm delivery, and low birth weight babies (Stewart et al, 2003). It seems logical to assume that prison is not a calming, low-stress environment. Navigating the American judicial system would be an extremely stressful process for a white man, let alone a pregnant black woman combatting discriminatory laws and both overt and covert racism. Regardless of the technical medical care a woman might receive once in prison, she and the fetus are both at significantly higher risks of complications simply because of the constant barrage of assaults against her mental health. A recent study found that 70% of pregnant prisoners were clinically depressed during their third trimester (Mukherjee, 2014). As if this were not cause for concern in itself considering the potential consequences for mother and baby during delivery, it has also been shown that prenatal mental health is predictive of postnatal mental health (Stewart et al, 2003).

There is a strong association between antenatal stress or depression and postnatal depression of varying degrees. Some of the most common antenatal predictors of conditions such as Postpartum Depression are depression/anxiety during pregnancy, recent stressful life events,

poor social support, poor relationship with a partner, and low socio-economic status (Stewart et al, 2003). One of the challenges particular to social relationships for women in prison pertains to the physical location of the prison. While the number of women being sent to prison is certainly increasing, the over all number is still rather small meaning that there are very few women's prisons. Subsequently, women are often sent to facilities that are too far away for friends and family to come visit given the time and economic costs. No matter how well intentioned a woman's social network and partner may be, this physical barrier makes it extremely difficult for a pregnant woman in prison to receive the social and emotional support that she needs. Given that 13% of women in the general population will develop postnatal depression, it should be clear that women in such vulnerable positions, who will likely have many of the risk factors, should be closely monitored after delivery (Stewart et al, 2003). Unfortunately, there are very few prisons that have meaningful plans for care and support after delivery.

In the vast majority of cases, when a pregnant women delivers her baby in some sort of prison healthcare facility, she is allowed a maximum of 24 hours in the hospital. However, within these 24 hours she will likely only spend two hours with her child: one hour per twelve hour guard shift. She is allowed the medically necessary time to recover but unfortunately for both mother and baby, there is no real time for maternal-child bonding and only scant time for breast feeding (NWLC, 2010). It is a medical fact that breast feeding shortly after delivery not only confers enormous physical health benefits for mother and child but also that the hormones released during this time have a significant effect on mood and mental health for the mother. Many of the signs and symptoms of Postpartum Depression are tied to certain behaviors or feelings that involve the mother's perception of and relationship to the baby (Stewart et al, 2003).

This means that accurately diagnosing this condition in a group of women separated against their will from their newborns at birth may be quite challenging. It is important that future research study Postpartum Depression particularly in the highly vulnerable female prison population in order to understand more accurately how it presents and how it can be treated. Additionally, it is necessary that prisons implement some sort of postpartum care. Currently, the specific health needs of the pregnant women are no longer considered once they have delivered. All of the mental health concerns associated with being in prison, forcibly separated from a newborn, and the dramatically changing hormones that occur postpartum are entirely ignored by the prison healthcare system.

D. The Policy Environment and Consequences for Families

This is not only a problem for the mother's psychosocial health but also has implications for the child she is carrying and any children she may have already had. Between 1991 and 2007, the number of children with parents in prison increased 80%; correspondingly, the number of mothers in prison increased 122% during this same period (Parents in Prison, 2012). Of these incarcerated mothers, a significant majority had previously been living with their children, and it is not uncommon for these mothers to be sent to a facility more than 100 miles away from the residence they shared with their children (Parents in Prison, 2012). As previously mentioned, the lack of treatment for substance abuse disorders and other mental health issues is a significant missed opportunity to truly rehabilitate women who are incarcerated. The same is true of the dearth of resources mothers are provided with in order to be quality parents not only while incarcerated but also once released. Only 12% of parents in prison received any sort of child

rearing education (Parents in Prison, 2012). Additionally, once released, a mother faces enormous challenges to reestablishing herself as a parent and a provider. The intricacies of these relationships will be more fully developed in later chapters and exemplified by the realities of women who are currently combatting the extensive barriers to family and health that are created by the criminal justice system.

There are two pieces of legislation that are particularly damaging to the structure of families that include an incarcerated parent. The first is *The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997*, which will be discussed in detail in the context of maternal rights in Chapter Six. ASFA terminates parental rights if a mother has not been allowed custody of her child for 15 of the past 22 months. While there are relatively few mothers whose children are in foster care while they are incarcerated, for those who are, reuniting with the mother after her sentence is nearly impossible (Parents in Prison, 2012). A second piece of legislation, *The Welfare Reform Act of 1996*, does further damage to the structure of poor families. This act permanently denies welfare benefits and food stamps to anyone convicted of a felony drug offense, which as previously mentioned is one of the major reasons for female incarceration. This poses a significant problem because prior to incarceration, 36% of mothers in prison had been receiving welfare (Parents in Prison, 2012). There are similar, rather broadly written, policies that prevent people who have been convicted of drug offenses from finding housing, be it Section 8 or privately owned. All of these factors accumulate to make it particularly difficult for women to be successful parents raising healthy, happy children once released. For the women who were incarcerated at the time of delivery, unable to bond or breast feed, the deck is certainly stacked against them. The strict incarceration of pregnant women therefore not only punishes the women themselves but also the

next generation of children, creating a vicious cycle of lack of opportunity for America's most disadvantaged communities.

There have been a handful of success stories in recent years that have protected the psychophysiological health of these women. The first was a 2008 federal change in the shackling policy. Until 2008, women could be shackled all throughout pregnancy, labor, and delivery. In fact, there were times when chains were placed not only on hands and feet, but also across the belly of a pregnant women (NWLC, 2010). The 2008 policy change recognized how inhumane it was to shackle a woman during labor and delivery and instituted a new policy that demands all instances of shackling during pregnancy be reported and justified to the Department of Corrections. An additional piece of legislation that is likely to make a significant difference in the coming years is the Second Chance Act. This policy allows states to apply for federal money to implement alternative sentencing programs. States can use this money to establish prison nurseries that allow women and children to stay together for 6-18 months. It can also be used to establish programs in which pregnant women live in something akin to a half way house with mandatory drug counseling as an alternative to time behind bars (NWLC, 2010). Alternative sentencing programs are quite new, and there is still much to be learned about how to best implement them. Unfortunately, there has been very little legislation that specifically addresses the mental health needs of these women. Hopefully, as the times are beginning to change and more public health resources are being channeled into mental health programs, the specific needs of these women will be acknowledged and treated.

This sketch of the demographic profile of America's prison population and the policy environment that exists within the criminal justice system has barely begun to scratch the surface

of the realities of incarceration in America. Far more comprehensive analyses have been written, and they are required reading for anyone who seeks to understand the nature and history of the American criminal justice system. However, the vast majority of the resources are designed to explain incarceration from a bird's eye view, to provide the big picture, tracing policy trends and situating them within the broader American political climate. In attempting to construct a narrative that is able to encompass the vast, complex, bureaucracy that is the American system of incarceration, the unique voices of individuals are lost. This is particularly true for women who are incarcerated because as only 7% of the prison population the particularities of their experiences are often lost within the sea of male mass incarceration. It is my intention to revitalize this neglected voice. Far from the overarching descriptions that typify the genre of criminal justice analysis, what follows here is a steadfast attempt to give a few dozen pregnant incarcerated women space and time to share their unique stories contextualized within an anthropological framework.

3. Myself as an Instrument of Investigation and Human Subjects

A. Navigating My Role

In order to try and understand how all of these numbers and trends impact the lived experiences of pregnant women who are incarcerated, I became a teacher with Motherhood Beyond Bars (MBB). For twelve weeks every Friday afternoon, I travelled to Helms Facility to teach what was scheduled to be an hour long class based on a nine week curriculum that had been prepared for me. As a new teacher for all official class discussions, I was working with another co-teacher who had more experience with the material in the curriculum. Much of the information presented here comes not from class meetings themselves but from informal discussions after class. When it was feasible, I would bring supplies for making cards for children, writing letters, or some games such as word searches and sudoku. These informal after class meetings allowed the women to veer from the curriculum and express any concerns that had arisen in the past week.

My role as a teacher with MBB would turn out to be one that was fraught with ethical and ethnographic complications as I walked the thin line between being strongly and indignantly on the side of those who are incarcerated and having to adhere to institutional norms and regulations. Being a teacher as opposed to an observer fundamentally changed my scope of practice. During classes I would scribble down particularly important quotations, however, taking extensive notes during class would have created a strange distance between myself and the women I was meant to be teaching. Additionally, as a teacher tasked with providing useful, educational information, it became more important to make sure that I was taking notes about all of the questions the women in class asked that I did not know the answers to. I knew nothing of

“open defense cases,” the differences in federal and state policies on shackling during pregnancy, what the normal pulse for a pregnant woman is, how often ultrasounds should be administered. The vast majority of my notes are a series of legal and medical questions that I hoped to be able to answer by the time I returned the following week.

Striking the balance between condoning the actions of the prison, as was required of me by the organization I was teaching through, while acknowledging and honoring the palpable distress of the women in my class eventually resulted with me being shut out of the program. Given the scope of the ideological and ethical issues that must be addressed in order to understand incarcerated motherhood, particularly as it happens for pregnant women, one would need to spend far more time than a few months as a visiting teacher to form a complete picture. In an attempt to address this inherent shortcoming, wherever possible the voices of incarcerated women and the stories they told me will be privileged. Unfortunately, for a handful of reasons, even within the domain of the classroom, presumably a safe space for the women, their experiences were often dismissed by a co-teacher I was working with.

B. Motherhood Beyond Bars as an Institution

The existence of this conflict between myself and other members of the institution I was working with not only informed the type of information I was able to learn but also limited the overall quantity of information I was given access to. It is important to foreground an explanation of this conflict with the fact that everyone who works with MBB has the wellbeing of the women at Helms at heart. MBB is a volunteer organization that is given conditional access to the women at Helms via the leadership there. As MBB’s mission statement asserts, they,

“envision a world where incarceration is not a sentence to poor health for women and their children.” This passively acknowledges that the state of being incarcerated has a negative impact on the health of women and developing children. Unfortunately, this is where a paradox arises. MBB is given permission to run this course through the Georgia Department of Corrections (GADoC). As a result, the continuation of this course is always conditional upon the approval of GADoC. This puts MBB in a position where the original purpose of the organization, addressing the health complications that incarceration creates, fundamentally counters the narrative that the healthcare-correctional facility in which the class takes is tending to the women’s health appropriately. All volunteers of MBB are then put in a position where they can never indict the wrongdoings or negative health implications of the facility because that would jeopardize the longevity of the program.

In an attempt to safe guard the continuation of the program, MBB must turn a blind eye to many of the concerns raised by the women themselves during group discussions. As a result, when women raise questions about the quality of the healthcare they are receiving for example, MBB volunteers are to promote the status quo that the doctors at the prison are providing all of the necessary prenatal care the women need. Unfortunately, given that MBB is such a small organization, there was no one who did volunteer training, and I was not initially informed of this piece of information. For the first few weeks I would stay after class, facilitating small activities and chatting with women while we made cards or did puzzles.

I felt that if I were to learn the women’s opinions about what specifically was wrong with life in this prison, it would be necessary for me to distance myself from the idea that I was acting as an agent of the institution. Having distanced myself from the prison was very much a

double edged sword: for a few class sessions conversation was distinctly free flowing and honest; shortly thereafter, my creative license as a teacher was explicitly rescinded. I was no longer allowed to stay after class to facilitate the small discussions; my co-teacher began actively countering the narrative that I had been allowing to dominate class discussion - namely that the practices at the prison were directly harmful to health and wellbeing. My ability to engage in an open and honest dialogue was quickly swept away as I began receiving emails on Friday mornings discouraging my coming to class that afternoon.

C. Limitations

Methodologically, being discouraged from attending class and not being allowed to participate when I did, obviously created quite the barrier to my being able to do a project that would allow me to explain the experience of motherhood and pregnancy in prison as incarcerated women themselves would explain it. My original hope had been that with enough careful listening I would be able to begin to understand what community and motherhood mean for incarcerated pregnant women, all of whom, with the exception of one, had young children at home. There were already a plethora of limitations in place before I began to bump heads with the stipulations of MBB and Helms. First of all, I could never truly participate with my community as part of their group. I am unusually dependent upon the stories that were shared with me because spending three hours per week in a prison could never come close to replicating the experience of incarceration. Therefore, it is not feasible for me to explain community in this particular setting as an insider would experience it. My second major hurdle was attempting to bridge the cultural gap that existed between myself and the women who were in my class. As a

college educated, middle class, white woman, raised in the North who had never been pregnant nor even arrested, I found myself grasping at straws for ways to relate for at least the first month of classes I attended. Slowly, as I became familiar with the ins and outs of daily life and the concerns of the women at Helms, we found common ground.

I had anticipated having to follow a plethora of rules that had to do with security, personal relationships, or logistics. It seemed fair that cellphones were not allowed inside and that as a volunteer I could not be put on the personal visiting lists of any of the women from class. However, as I began to understand daily life within the prison, it became harder for me to uphold the status quo and promote the party line that the treatment and conditions at Helms were suitable and acceptable for pregnant women. At first, as someone who was filling a role that had typically been fulfilled by other people who were at ease with being more firmly entrenched within the institutional norms of the prison, there was a pronounced space between me and the women who participated in this class. In time, as the women came to understand where I stood on many of the issues they were experiencing, this distance diminished and much more open conversations ensued. However, shortly after these communication channels were opened, I began being called in for meetings to discuss my, “scope of practice as a teacher” and shortly thereafter was no longer able to participate as a teacher at all.

The last major challenge I encountered had not to do with myself per se but was related to the fickle nature of a project dependent on human subjects. During my third week as a teacher, when I felt I was starting to develop something that resembled rapport with the women in class, we were chatting about the children that everyone had at home. Natalie, a mother of nine who was pregnant with her tenth baby, was talking about her plans for her and her child after her

release. While chatting with Natalie about her plans for her tenth baby, she implied that she would indeed have custody of this baby as she did her older children. After class, when speaking with a prison administrator, I mentioned how nice it was to have Natalie in class. How fortunate to have a mother who had given birth nine times previously. The administrator pushed back. Yes, Natalie had been pregnant nine times before, but the administrator told me that she had already coordinated plans for this tenth baby to be received by the foster care system, where Natalie's other nine children were also sheltered. Natalie had seemed so open, so forthcoming. I was not sure how to process that what she had been sharing with me had been far from the factual truth. I suddenly considered all of the stories I was being told with more skepticism. I found myself wondering how I would write about the experiences and lives of these women if I were not sure what was true and what was fabricated.

For present purposes, I have decided that what is and is not absolutely true is not my primary concern. Of course, if I come to know that something I have been told is pure fiction then I will not repeat it here as if it were true. However, my aim was not to interrogate the women of Helms but to represent their lived experiences to the best of my ability, to weave their narratives together to help understand what community, identity, and motherhood mean for this group. It is therefore not about fact and fiction but about lived experiences and embodied perceptions, as told me to by this group of women. It is important to understand that whatever I am able to offer with respect to the narratives and experiences of women in prison will be incomplete in myriad ways. In their book, *Interrupted Life: Experiences of Incarcerated Women in the United States*, Solinger et al. open by noting that, "to believe any of us can fully render this

picture for ourselves or for anyone else is [unconscionable]. We must also recognize that we cannot sufficiently know the complex reality of the prison system” (Solinger et al, p. 1, 2010).

What I offer here is a snapshot of the lives of incarcerated pregnant women: a small segment of the life that I was allowed to observe and engage with. Not only is what follows incomplete because I am unable to capture the full experience of motherhood within prison but also because I was unable to follow up with the communities of those who are incarcerated and who play such a vital role in the shaping of motherhood for women who are incarcerated. The mothers, partners, and children of women who are incarcerated are essential figures in shaping the experiences of motherhood and in order to have a complete understanding of this phenomenon it would be necessary to include their voices as well³. In the absence of these external communities, what follows here is incomplete but still substantial. The stories and experiences that were shared during class were consistently striking, profound, and deeply deserving of being retold to a broader audience, even if only as a small piece of a much more complex phenomenon.

The women of Helms challenged the most basic assumptions and understandings of community and culture. I set out with the notion that this group was in fact a cultural group that could be understood according to a single framework. The concept of incarceration fundamentally challenges how one can define the boundaries of a community. More than understanding community, what I first found myself attempting to unpack was the meaning of identity and the conception of motherhood within prison for this particular group of women.

Additionally, throughout my time as a teacher with *Motherhood Beyond Bars*, I was not

³ For a portrait of motherhood that includes input from mothers, partners, and children of incarcerated women see Enos 2001 & Solinger 2010

engaging with community in a traditional, participant-observation framework. While I have tried to understand the community there to the best of my ability, I never truly participated in it. At the end of every class, I was free to go. I sat in the front of the classroom, necessarily marked by difference: I did not wear their uniform, I was not pregnant, and I was always the youngest woman in the room.

4. A Basic Sketch of Daily Life and Circumstances

A. Helms as a Medical Facility

Helms facility is relatively unique in comparison to other state prisons. All of the people that are housed at Helms have been convicted a felony, but they are also in need of medical care. Men and women throughout the state of Georgia who have been designated as needing specialized medical care will be housed at Helms until the health condition changes. There are two important things to highlight about Helms that have a direct impact on the way the facility is run. First, Helms houses both men and women meaning that guards can be expected to monitor both groups of people. While the men that are housed there are also ill, their presence alone has important implications. As a dual gendered⁴ facility, Helms employs both male and female corrections officers. The implications of male officers supervising female inmates will be more specifically explored in detail the next chapter. This also means that the facility itself is designed with the security needs associated with housing supposedly violent male criminals in mind. Given that the number of potentially ill men under the control of the Georgia Department of Corrections is substantially higher than the number of pregnant women the system expects to care for, the rules and organization of Helms are designed with the needs of men and not those of pregnant women in mind.

The second critical point to underscore about Helms is that it is in fact intended as a medical facility. As a result there are far more nurses available than there would be in the average non-medical facility. Healthcare is intended to be more accessible than it would be in a less

⁴The Georgia Department of Corrections speaks of two genders and thus that is the construct used here. The experiences of transgender people and non-binary people, however, should not be forgotten or dismissed.

specialized facility. While there are certainly comforts that come with being in this type of facility as opposed to a non-specialized prison there are also significant drawbacks. For example because the population housed here is typically ill or pregnant, it is assumed that the work related activities that are available at other prisons should not be implemented here. While it is certainly correct that pregnant women should not be engaging in some of the types of labor exist in other facilities, the entire lack of work opportunities contributes to the perpetual boredom that governs the days at Helms. Additionally, there are many fewer enrichment activities provided because there are often not enough women housed at Helms at any one time for it to be considered worth it to offer a particular class. Even the classes that are offered at Helms are not always available if they do not feel there is a significant enough number of women who will benefit from it. It is instructive to note the differences between the programs offered at Helms and at Lee Arrendale, another state prison that is specifically for women and juvenile girls. Helms offers,

Academic: General Education Diploma & Adult Basic Education

Counseling: Moral Recognition Therapy, Active Parenting, & Motivation For Change

Medical: 24 hour medical care is provided along with specialty Services

Recreation: General Recreation

Religious Activities: Various worship services that are conducted by volunteers

On the other hand Lee Arrendale offers,

Academic: General Equivalency Diploma, Adult Basic Education, Literacy, Special Education

Counseling: Moral Reconation Therapy, Motivation for Change, Family Violence, Thinking for a Change, Re-Entry, Parenting, Relapse Prevention, Behavior Stabilization, Career Center

Recreation: General Recreation

Religious Activities: Various Worship Services, Bible Study, & Pastoral Counseling

Vocational/OJT: Small Engine Repair, Auto Mechanics, Auto Paint, Woodworking, Cosmetology, Electrical Wiring, Warehousing, Auto Detailing, Welding (Metal Fabrication), Food Service, Fire Department, Educational & Library Aides, Office Technology, Maintenance/Detailing, Culinary Arts, Farm Worker, Guide Dog Program, Veterinary Technician, Dog Grooming, Forever Friends Dog Rescue

It is clear that Helms is intended to be a facility that offers more specialized resources for pregnant women than would otherwise be available. This is a laudable goal, and specialized medical care for women in prison should certainly be encouraged. However, it is worth considering how beneficial it is to house women in a subset of a prison that also serves men, is staffed by male guards, and offers remarkably few programming options in comparison to the resources that are available at other facilities that exclusively serve women and girls such as Lee Arrendale.

B. Navigating Daily Discomforts

Motherhood Behind Bars was one of the few classes that was technically available at Helms. Despite the glaring signs that pointed to me as an outsider, I did my best to cultivate a classroom space and a personality as teacher that encouraged the women in my class to think of our classroom as a safe space. Certain institutional stances my co-teachers and I were expected to adhere to severely limited moments of truly uninhibited dialogue. Our classroom was the “library” at Helms where the books, many of them biblical in nature, and puzzles were kept. The walls were decorated with posters from the “Motivation to Change” class and signs declaring that, “sexual assault is not a part of your sentence.” The room was much too small, and the women were constantly too hot, something that would eventually become a very serious point of contention between our group and one particularly regimented corrections officer. The temperature of the room might seem like a peculiar detail to include in a paper that is hoping to clarify the experience of pregnancy and motherhood in prison. However, the simple fact that there was not a fan in our classroom was consistently a hurdle. Frequently, we would shut the

door in an attempt to be able to offer some sort of privacy. The women were frequently at odds with a specific officer or policy so in order to allow them to express themselves freely, it was important that they could not be easily overheard. Given our setting, however, officers were never far away. Unfortunately, when we closed the door for privacy, we also would incidentally create a sauna.

On the days when there were particularly significant concerns, the women would deal with the heat in order to have some time to express grievances. However, the women frequently told me that they were too uncomfortable to spend any more time in the classroom because being pregnant and hot is a uniquely uncomfortable feeling. While this may seem like a trivial detail, it was emblematic of a much larger and persistent struggle the women of Helms experienced: achieving a modicum of comfort and privacy while adhering to the structures and rules applied to them. There are multifaceted ways in which the minutia of daily life, things that are taken for granted and excluded from common representations of incarceration, have a significant effect on the lived experiences of these women. When one imagines a prison, chains, metal bars, and razor wire come to mind. One forgets that for those who are incarcerated heat, spiders, and uncomfortable mattresses may become far more persistent day to day discomforts.

The women at Helms find another source of discomfort in the rigors of the schedule that they are expected to adhere to. Breakfast is provided between 5-6am, lunch between 11-12am, and dinner between 4-5pm. This time frame is not uncommon throughout correctional facilities, however, for pregnant women such a schedule poses particular challenges. For example, a woman must be standing up, ready to exit into the hallway in order to be let into the area where food is served precisely when the guard decides it is her time to go. If she is not up and ready by

that time then she is not allowed to go to that meal. Several of the women who were very close to their due dates indicated that for them, waking up and getting out of bed while eight months pregnant in and of itself took more time than was allotted, and they subsequently missed meals. No matter where a woman is living, the last weeks of pregnancy can be uncomfortable, but the rigors of incarceration added an additional layer of discomfort for these women. After waking up for breakfast, and if needed, medications that were provided before breakfast at 4:30 am, the women would return to their cells and nap for a few hours. Unfortunately, many women said this cycle of disrupted sleeping and eating left them feeling groggy or disoriented for much of the day.

Serving dinner at 4pm created similar problems. Given how early dinner was served, many women found themselves snacking on the food that was available from a vending machine because they were hungry again before they went to bed around 11pm. Despite waking up quite early, the women at Helms did not fall asleep until 11pm because much of the day was spent napping as a way of passing the time. Additionally, after lights out at 10pm, many women struggled to fall and stay asleep. Any woman who has been pregnant can tell you that sleeping through the night is impossible when there is a baby resting on your bladder. However, for the women of Helms who were sharing a cell with a pregnant roommate, every time her cellmate woke up to use the bathroom she too would be woken up. It is frustrating enough for an adult woman to be sharing a room with a stranger; for two pregnant women to share a room, sleeping on prison mattresses, waking each other up with snores, scuffles of position changes, and going to the bathroom, it is not possible to have a night of quality sleep. The realities of sharing a room while pregnant and the lack of privacy inherent in being incarcerated are other important

dynamics to consider. Privacy was never something that was explicitly discussed during our class time, but it is a fact of incarceration that private time for one to be not only alone but also unsupervised is non-existent. A more robust analysis of what daily life in prison is like should include a section investigating how loss the of privacy impacts an individual, particularly in cultures where privacy is highly valued.

In the hours after dinner before the women would attempt to sleep, women would snack on vending machine food. The food available from the vending machine was largely chips and candy bars, which according to the women offered roughly the same nutritional value as the food that was served during proper meals. This was one of the things that aggravated the pregnant women at Helms most. One of the frequent themes that came up during class discussion was that it was one thing to provide an inadequate diet to an incarcerated person but an entirely separate thing to provide a deficient diet to pregnant women. The most common complaint discussed in our class had to do with the protein content of the food served. Chicken was rarely served more than once a month and some form of fish was available occasionally but was not what an outside would recognize as clean, lean protein. The part of the diet that perturbed most of the women was a tricolor protein substitute referred to as “chuck wagon” that no one in class could identify with any conviction.

The women who had been incarcerated in other facilities where people were allowed to work in the kitchen recognized the mystery meat du jour. For example, Tina, who had been incarcerated previously, explained that kitchen duty was her preferred job because it allowed her slightly more control over her diet. While working kitchen duty, Tina noted that the box that the tricolor protein substitute comes in was labeled, “not fit for long term human consumption.” I

cannot corroborate this, but Tina was not the only woman who was certain that the main protein source being served was not intended for humans. Ariel's partner had attempted to figure out what exactly "chuck wagon" is, and Ariel explained that his best guess was that it seemed to have something in common with the protein base used for commercial dog food. There is no way to be sure what exactly this meat substitute is, but it is telling to know that the women at Helm's feel their health is valued so little that it is considered entirely plausible that they are being fed food that is "not fit for long term human consumption." This particular sleeping and meal schedule is one that is found throughout many prisons in America, the vast majority of which were created to warehouse men. It is clear that the schedule at Helms was not designed with pregnant women, for whom sleep hygiene and proper nutrition are particularly important, in mind.

To compensate for the disrupted and disorienting sleep schedule that is created by the meal schedule, all of the women said they would nap throughout the day. Time and again, the women said that there was not enough to do during the day, so they would try and sleep as much as possible to pass time. Boredom defined a great deal of these women's lives, and while boredom in and of itself is not necessarily problematic the role that it plays in contributing to overall negative mental health is not insignificant. A yoga class is offered once a week and technically there is an hour of recreation time every day, but often recreation takes the form of sitting and watching TV in the communal area instead of sitting quietly in a cell. In the past, the women had said that they used to have more access to the yard during the recreation hour, but access to this resource was entirely contingent upon which officers were working which shifts. If an officer did not want to be responsible for supervising the women outside in the yard for some

particular reason then “rec time” was limited to the handful of puzzles in the library, card games in the canteen, or watching TV. As long as a woman was not inside her cell then this time could be considered her recreation time. For some women, the MBB class counted as their daily recreation time. Stationary in the library for an hour, roughly a dozen women would gather for what was scheduled to be a one hour class on Fridays.

Upon entering Helms for my first class, one of the first things that I noticed about the women there was that they were all wearing matching tan uniforms and bright orange crocs: an obvious but essential observation. The women’s uniforms closely resemble medical scrubs. The women even have plastic badges clipped to their uniforms akin to the IDs clipped to hospital staff. However, the first distinguishing characteristic of these scrubs is that they have other people’s names scrawled across them in permanent marker. These uniforms are residue of a bygone era in which the women were not given plastic ID badges but were instead identified by the name that was written on their uniforms. In light of the ID badges, it appears laundry is no longer distributed according to whom it belongs to but instead each woman could wear any uniform without the need for any initial pesky sorting. As a result, many of the women ended up wearing uniforms with someone else’s name written across her chest while her ID badge, not visible unless within arm’s reach of the woman, stated her appropriate identity. It is one thing to wear a uniform, its another to be so stripped of an identity as to wear a uniform with someone else’s name printed across its front.

The sociological power of a uniform is not to be understated. Uniforms mark in-groups and out-groups. They provide a powerful visual marker of status and power. Prison uniforms in particular have a history of having been designed specifically to humiliate. Although the days of

striped or electric orange jumpsuits have faded, one can find residuals within contemporary prisons. It would not be inappropriate to speculate that the bright orange crocs worn by the women of Helms are intended to invoke the history of prison uniforms that were previously designed with the idea of marking lowest possible status that a collective group of people could be ascribed to within a society (Zaitzow & Thomas, 2003). These uniforms were the first and most visible emblem of the struggles pertaining to identity that I would begin to recognize among the women of Helms. While my intent was to understand what motherhood and pregnancy meant for this group of women, I realized before I could jump to concepts of mothering while incarcerated, I would first need a general understanding of what it meant to be an individual who is incarcerated and how one navigates forming a salient and meaningful identity in an institution that seeks to apply a simple, reductionist, and distinctly negative label to all of the women within its domain. Fundamental to the identity of almost all of the women who participated in class was the fact that they were mothers to dependent children who remained, “on the outside.”

C. The Role of Socioeconomic Status in Incarceration

In the United States, motherhood is not frequently framed as an inherently stressful or scary endeavor. Certainly unplanned pregnancies are not always cause for celebration, but in America, the act of becoming a mother is not discussed in the dominant narrative as an adverse life experience. However, for many of the women in class, their experiences of motherhood both during and while free from incarceration had been made substantially more stressful because of experiences of trauma and low socioeconomic status. One of the most obvious indicators of

persistent low economic status throughout these women's lives was the very low proportion of women who had completed traditional high school. While there were certainly women who had graduated from high school, a significant majority of women told me that they had completed their GED's while incarcerated; if not during this period of incarcerations then during previous sentences.

Along with low levels of education and poor socioeconomic background, one of the other common demographic trends did hold some truth: The vast majority of the women I worked with had been convicted of either a drug related crime or a "crime of survival". Crimes of survival include, petty theft, check forgery, or breaking and entering. These are crimes that are committed not in hopes of large windfalls or with the desire to harm society but that are committed to keep oneself and one's family afloat. Occasionally crimes of survival are committed in order to have the excess cash needed to purchase small quantities of drugs, necessary to stave off the harsh realities of drug withdrawal. While there are crimes of survival that do cause harm to other individuals, it is important to acknowledge the cases in which crimes of survival are truly victimless crimes.

The criminalization of certain survival strategies specifically targets the lifestyles of the poorest members of a society. For example, pan handling in public spaces, loitering, and breaking and entering into abandoned buildings all technically constitute misdemeanor crimes. It is relevant to ask if these laws protect society or punish poverty. The women of Helms had been convicted of felonies so their crimes of survival are typically a degree more serious in nature, but the question remains. While considering the criminalization of poverty, it is also critical to consider which does more harm to society at large: allowing alternative sentencing for someone

convicted of crimes such as petty theft and drug possession or incarcerating a pregnant mother of dependent children. The answers to these questions that call into question the nature of the American criminal code are beyond the scope of this thesis. However, they draw attention to the policy and legal environment in which these low-income mothers have been convicted. Crimes of survival are also essential to address because they allow a more critical analysis of the relationship between low socioeconomic status, drug use, and recidivism. As a result of poor or non-existent drug treatment programs in prison and low socioeconomic status, a vicious cycle of reincarceration emerges; this was evidenced by the fact that the majority of the women in class had been incarcerated previously.

A significant number of women at Helms found themselves incarcerated because they had violated the terms of probation or parole. For Ariel, who had planned her current pregnancy expecting to be home with her first child and partner, her return to incarceration came as quite the surprise. The probation system is one that is riddled with an enormous number of obstacles and opaque policies that are frequently not clearly understood by those who are subjected to them. The typical probation officer might be responsible for between 200-300 cases, making time for face-to-face meetings virtually impossible. In fact, a growing number of probation agencies, many of which are privately owned companies, depend on automated kiosks that take biometric scans and require a specific pin number, thus proving that the person on probation has not fled the area (National Resource Council, 2008). These automated systems are unable to answer questions or provide guidance and assistance to any of the people who made need actual support from a probation or parole officer.

This lack of support from probation and parole officers has exceptional real life consequences for formerly incarcerated people and their families. In Ariel's case, she believed she had been following the terms of probation. She was paying her court restitution fee and adhering to all of the other legal terms mandated for her. However, she was unaware that there was a separate fee required for the services of the probation office itself. As a result, Ariel found herself incarcerated while pregnant because she had failed to pay the roughly \$200 that were required monthly to her probation supervisor, a person she had so little contact with she was unaware that she owed this fee to begin with. While it should certainly be true that the women on probation or parole understand incarceration is a looming threat, it is not uncommon for a woman to be surprised that she has violated the terms of probation. Ariel consciously planned a pregnancy hoping that her first child would have a sibling close in age. She attempted to diligently adhere to the terms of her probation, but at the end of the day the burden of fines resulted in her ultimately being unexpectedly sent to prison. No where in the American criminal code is it technically illegal to be poor, but the sheer number of people who are incarcerated simply because they cannot afford the fines and fees associated with the criminal justice system may be evidence that such laws are implicit in our justice system.

D. Structural Violence

For many of the women in the class, the ins and outs of prison life had become relatively mundane. Helms was unique in that it allowed for incarcerated pregnant women to all be housed together. Unfortunately, after delivery, whatever community had been established would be dissolved after the women had given birth and were sent to a handful of facilities in different

counties throughout the state. What soon became clear, however, was that for many women these prisons would not be new experiences. The women participating in class would give each other information about which jobs were best or which classes were most helpful at the next facility they expected to be sent to. I was told about a often told stories about events in other correctional facilities that were described in such a way as to make the experience of incarceration seem entirely normal some of the women. However, what remained unique about this experience was that, for all but one woman, this was the first time they had been incarcerated while pregnant. Navigating incarceration while pregnant represented an entirely new set of conditions and prompted a new set of concerns for many women who now had the needs of another growing human being in mind.

All of the above experiences took place in a correctional facility that is specifically intended to address the healthcare needs of Georgia's ill prison population. However, as indicated by the women, the specific policies that were governing their behavior were often creating conditions that exacerbated ill health for pregnant women in particular. This idea that the policies that govern a human's behavior can create circumstances of ill health has been described by Paul Farmer as structural violence. Structural violence is a concept that was originally discussed by Johan Galtung in his 1969 article, *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*. Galtung theorized that violence can arise from social structures or institutions that prevent people from being able to meet their basic needs. For Galtung, structural violence could stem from a range of social structures including institutionalized agism, ableism and a host of other social ills. While structural violence can result in a host of rights violations, Paul Farmer has specifically discussed the role that structural violence plays in causing ill health.

Given that structural violence is often obfuscated and insidious, its effect on health and healthcare is often layered and nuanced. The effects of structural violence can be seen in the form of everything from overt discrimination, lack of access to treatment, and even denial of the severity and reality of a healthcare problem. Structural violence serves to marginalize and diminish the experiences of people who are incarcerated because those groups who hold the least amount of power in society are often those who find themselves subjected to the bio-power of the state (Farmer, 2003). In his book *Pathologies of Power*, Paul Farmer defines structural violence as a “host of offensives against human dignity: extreme and relative poverty, social inequalities ranging from racism to gender inequality” (p.8, 2003). He goes on to say that structural violence is a function of “social and economic inequalities that determine who will be at risk for assaults and who will be shielded from them” (p 17-18, 2003). As expressed by Farmer, structural violence is a reflection of power dynamics: those with the least social, political, and economic power are those that fall prey to its effects (Farmer 2003). While the role that structural violence plays in the war on drugs is a critical piece for understanding the nature of the American criminal justice system, for present purposes its direct implications on the healthcare for the women at Helms is most illustrative. There were two examples in which elements of daily life in prison became structurally violent healthcare concerns: a spider bite and an incidence of shackling during labor and delivery.

One week Tina came to class visibly distressed. Having been bitten by a spider earlier in the week, Tina was holding her leg and was clearly in quite a bit of pain. I told Tina I would come early next week and review that material with her so she could keep up with the class and that she rest this week. She left for the nurses station but returned shortly thereafter. Class today

counted as her required rec time, and she was not allowed to return to her cell until the hour of rec time was up. When I returned the following week, Tina was not in class; some of the other women in class told me that Tina had been sent to the hospital after the skin around her spider bite had started to turn black and blue, and she was still recovering. The following week, Tina returned to class and shared that she had been bitten by a brown recluse spider. Had Tina's bite been treated when it initially happened, it would have required only basic first aid instead of a trip to the hospital and course of strong antibiotics.

While Tina was recounting her experience, other women chimed in with complaints about spiders. While no other woman had experienced an incident as severe as Tina's, it seemed all other women had encountered spiders in their cells. My co-teacher for the day, a woman who more closely shared my feelings about the status of the health environment in prison than other co-teachers, asked if anyone had spoken to an administrator about this. Caroline told us that she had raised this concern and that in response an administrator had asked her, "What do you have against spiders?" The apathy that the prison demonstrated for the environment that these women were housed in allowed for the conditions to arise in which a pregnant woman ended up being bitten by a poisonous spider. Furthermore, despite being housed in a medical facility capable of caring for the wound in its early stages, Tina's complaint was ignored by healthcare staff until it became an emergency.

If the prison had policies in place that required certain minimum standards for the cells that women are kept in, the women would not be exposed to venomous spiders. I was also told of concerns that women had about mold growing in the cells. When the women voiced their concerns about the mold, it was eventually painted over but was never properly cleaned. Despite

billing itself as a healthcare facility, the conditions in the cells at Helms directly contribute to health problems for the pregnant women there. When one considers the fact that no federal or state mandates require correctional health facilities to obtain accreditation, it becomes clear that the quality of the healthcare being offered at this facility is likely quite subpar (Committee for Underserved Women, 2012). Another example of structural violence in action that has long been taken for granted as a fact of incarceration pertains to the shackling of pregnant women who are incarcerated.

In a relatively unusual case, Ariel had actually been incarcerated during her pregnancy with her first child as well. As a result she was the only woman in class who could testify to what it was like to give birth while incarcerated. During the lesson about what to expect during labor and delivery and how to manage pain, Ariel informed us that much of the information we were offering was relatively useless; The information was not tailored to the specific conditions that arise when an incarcerated woman gives birth. During Ariel's previous delivery while incarcerated, she had been shackled on the way to and from the hospital and had her ankle cuffed to the bed during labor and delivery. She was also under constant supervision by a guard during labor and delivery. Despite the fact that the shackling of pregnant women has been outlawed by federal prisons and is vehemently discouraged by the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) because of the adverse health outcomes it can lead to, GADoC had not amended its policy on restraints (Committee for Underserved Women, 2011).

ACOG defines restraints as, "using physical restraint or mechanical devices to control the movement of a prisoner's body or limbs, including handcuffs, leg shackles, and belly chains" (2011). There are restrictions limiting the ability of an officer to shackle a pregnant

woman but so long as a state prison reports incidents of shackling to the Department of Justice, it is still permitted. Ariel and her baby had gone through labor and delivery in relatively good health. However, the practice of shackling opens women up for critical healthcare risks. In their report on health for incarcerated pregnant women, ACOG points out that often pregnancies for incarcerated women are unusually high risk, making the additional harm caused by restraints even more problematic (2011). Additionally, “the use of restraints may not only compromise healthcare but is demeaning and rarely necessary” (CFUW, 2011, p. 3). Some of the healthcare risks that have been identified by ACOG include, the increased likelihood of and subsequent inability to protect oneself during a fall, delay in care in the case of vaginal bleeding, the inability to treat seizures promptly, and interference with normal labor and delivery - i.e. walking or movement to manage pain (CFUW, 2011).

There is perhaps no more clear visual for structural violence in action than that of a pregnant incarcerated woman giving birth while cuffed to a hospital bed despite the medical evidence that has demonstrated how dangerous this is for both mother and baby. Ariel’s telling of this story sparked a conversation amongst the women about the scale of the injustices that they were experiencing. Many women had been incarcerated before, but the experience of being pregnant seemed to have fundamentally changed the nature of incarceration for those women who had already served time. The embodied reality of pregnancy requires any woman to renegotiate how she perceives of her own body, health, and ability to make choices. For the women incarcerated at Helms, the rules and organization of the prison as an institution appeared to take on new significance. The women incarcerated at Helms were tasked with working out

how to understand the relationship between being a mother to a growing being while existing in an institution that suggested they were not fit to be citizens let alone mothers.

5. Power Structures

A. Power and the Implicit Threat

In order to understand how one experiences motherhood within prison, it is necessary to understand what being in jail or prison feels like. Physically, mentally, and emotionally, incarceration actively works to renegotiate autonomy and adulthood for those within its purview (Foucault, 1975). Constantly reasserting the power structure that exists between corrections officers and prisoners is a fundamental dynamic of daily life in any prison. While these two primary groups are taken for granted as an inherent part of any system of incarceration, this power relationship between prisoner and officer is perhaps the most critical element that must be understood in order to comprehend what it means to be an adult woman in prison. As a volunteer at Helms, the scope of my understanding of what life feels like when life is distinctly out of your own control is irrefutably shallow. I was always allowed to come and go as I pleased; there were certainly restrictions on what was permitted of me, but I operated with a fair degree of autonomy while within Helms. My experience represents the least restricted experience that one can have in a prison, but nonetheless was one that was marked consistently by unease and occasionally by real fear.

Volunteers are not allowed to bring any personal belongings into the facility. For most volunteers, this means purses are left in the car; for me, this meant leaving my phone at home and bringing only bus fare with me when I went to teach class. Once you arrive at the Metro Transitional Center bus stop, which is home to Helms, a juvenile detention facility, and what appears to be a state mandated rehab facility, it is a quick walk to the front gate of the Helms Facility. After being buzzed through two sets of 15-foot, barbed wire fences, you arrive at the

door to the front desk. What follows is similar to a less rigorous airport security screening. A guard will quickly analyze the contents of any bags, you walk through a metal detector, and then are scanned by a guard with one of the hand held, metal detector wands that are a favorite of TSA agents. I was free to come and go as a pleased, however, this was always contingent upon the cooperation of the guards who were working that day.

This concept, that my mobility was contingent upon the cooperation of the guards became particularly relevant when one of the guards whom I had gotten to know a little bit began asking me questions that were much too personal. One day after scanning me, this guard began to ask me about where I went out for drinks on the weekend. Attempting to skirt what I anticipated being uncomfortable territory, I told this guard that I was a student who spent most of her weekends in the library. He followed this by asking why my boyfriend did not take me nice places to get drinks; he told me that I should really find a man who would take me out and buy me drinks. His implication was clear. There was nothing inherently menacing about this conversation. Had it happened in any context where I was not physically locked into the building, I would have simply walked away from this man. However, I was uniquely aware of the fact that a man who was holding a gun and had unilateral authority over me and my actions was “hitting on” me, and he was the person that held the key to those three gates that stood between me and the rest of the world. It was a feeling of all-consuming powerlessness unlike any I had previously experienced.

This interaction recalled for me a policy that I read from the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. In this document the UN prohibits, “any involvement of male staff in the supervision of women’s prisons” (UN Handbook, p. 14). This

specifically gendered rule has been required by the United Nations because they have recognized that throughout the world, incarcerated women have disproportionately experienced sexual and physical abuse in the past. The UN has mandated the rule prohibiting male supervision of female prisoners as an attempt to minimize exacerbating of mental distress that the presence of such a powerful male figure may cause. The Handbook, mentions that,

“as has been noted by experts, even when there is no actual sexual abuse ‘when male officers treat women with disrespect it has a different impact than having women officers act disrespectfully to male prisoners. Disrespect towards women by male officers is more likely to be sexual in content or implication, and in women who were traumatized by sexual abuse perpetrated by males, it is more likely to be experienced as retraumatization” (United Nations, p. 14, 2015)

My interaction with this particular guard pales in comparison to the anxiety and fear that such an interaction might spark in an incarcerated woman with a previous history of sexual violence. However, it underscored for me just how powerful innuendo can be even when there is no hint of actual physical violence. Understanding the power that guards exert in even the lowest security prisons is essential to understanding the experience of existing in a prison. I always had much more power and privilege than any of the women whom I worked with. I can only imagine how such an interaction would be experienced when the man making you uncomfortable is also the person that controls your housing, your access to food, your access to medical care, and to sanitation. The force exerted by the guards was an ever present concern and manifested itself in a variety of ways throughout my time at Helms.

In her ethnography of a court mandated halfway house for women, Gail Caputo identified ways in which supposedly gender responsive programming such as reproductive healthcare under any form of incarceration quickly becomes oppressive. Caputo recognized that, “women’s

therapeutic interventions are shaped by patriarchal assumptions about women offenders, leading to oppressive conditions for female inmates.” (p. 12, 2014). These assumptions are based upon the patriarchal premise that women were morally weak and resulted in closer surveillance and more strict punishments for small infractions. Caputo’s theoretical model directly links patriarchal assumptions about women’s morality and the nature of their crimes to intentional limits on their agency by those charged with supervising them. While the women at Helm’s never directly identified specifically patriarchal assumptions as leading to increased supervision, they certainly felt the burden of intense, focused supervision and little to no personal decision making.

B. The Role of Corrections Officers

The idea of lack of individual control, access, and autonomy was well articulated by one woman who was explaining to me how she feels when attempting to ask for medical care and asserting her medical needs. Rosie, who was two months pregnant but facing up to five years of incarceration, said with reserved but profound conviction, “we are state property.” On its surface this idea might feel hyperbolic or like an overstatement, but when one investigates the legal construction of personhood while incarcerated, Rosie truly was correct. However, her point was not about the legal construction of her identity but about an embodied perception of powerlessness. Her statement served to explain the way she felt as an individual trying to navigate a system that at its core is designed to take her power away and make decisions for her. Rosie, like all of the mothers incarcerated at Helms, is incarcerated in a system fundamentally that assumes that to allow her agency would be a societal mistake. Rosie’s statement that she is state property

expresses the idea that she does not have her own decision making ability, and prison structures allow only the most basic bodily autonomy: dictating diet, exercise, sleep, and movement. In expressing this idea that the women of Helms lack ownership of their own bodies, Rosie made it clear to me that, at least to some degree, pregnancy in prison involves a dimension of feeling like you are growing a new human being in a body that does not belong to you.

The second time I witnessed the power of corrections officers was in the case of a window shade debacle that happened on a particularly warm class day. As was frequently the case, we were battling the choice of a steaming classroom with the door shut that allowed more privacy and freedom to express concerns or an open door and at least some degree of ventilation. One woman suggested an alternative: why not open one of the windows to get a bit of a breeze. Sasha, six months pregnant, threaded her way between the overcrowded room to the window. Sasha had raised the blind and was beginning to open the window when the door of the classroom flung open and two officers were suddenly standing next to me at the front of the room.

Why the officer did not necessarily link the open window shade with the person standing at the window is unclear. Regardless, upon barging into the room, he demanded to know who had opened the shade. He was met with a silence so thick that I was suddenly aware of the buzzing noise the fluorescent lights were making. The officer repeated his question two or three times, “which one of you opened that window shade. You know damn well you are not supposed to touch that. I will do it for you”. No one made a peep. No one made eye contact. No one so much as twitched in her seat. After what felt like an hour of stifling silence, the guard finally barked, “fine, I know y’all won’t snitch on each other,” walked to the window, flung the window

itself open, closed the blind, and stomped out of the room. The room continued to hold its collective breath for a few moments after his departure. I ventured over to close the door again, an action that now seemed fraught with potential conflict. With the door closed, the women collectively exhaled, and Sasha began to crack jokes, asking “What? I am going to open the window, six months pregnant, climb out, then climb two barbed wire fences?” Everyone cracked a smile and giggled.

This incident was the first time I was able to see true unity among the group. It became clear that guards and the women who are incarcerated at Helms do not necessarily have a one on one power struggle in the same way that I had experienced myself; there was very much an “us versus them” dynamic at play. What was in the grand scheme of things a rather trivial action, opening a window shade, was in this context an action that had far reaching consequences. The women in the classroom were faced with a very powerful authority figure, a person who quite literally held the keys to the most intimate and basic elements of their daily lives, demanding answers of them. Not only do guards have control over the minutia of daily life while incarcerated, they hold an untold amount of authority with respect to long-term sanctions and parole. Within the American justice system, there is an enormous amount of extra-judicial sentencing that happens with respect to the authority that guards and wardens have to promote or discourage parole for certain inmates (Foucault, 1975). The trope of being out on good behavior is in fact the result of a very real and powerful tool that is wielded by guards and wardens who have no explicit training in law or justice.

I do not seek to paint a picture of corrections officers who are inherently ill-intentioned or are somehow fundamentally bad people. For many of the people who take on this role, they are

enculturated into an environment that teaches them to see people who are incarcerated as inherently dangerous, determined to cause trouble, or perhaps even escape if given the opportunity. I do not wish to lambast the individual people who serve as person guards because I suspect, that when they return to their own communities or families, they are perfectly civil, kind humans. However, in their official capacity and when working as one part of the larger prison enforcement mechanism, guards represent a distinct, perceived evil for the women whom they are tasked with supervising. This perhaps has something to do with the dearth of specialized training programs for correction officers with respect to gender specific recommendations and supervision strategies (Gido & Dalley, 2009).

C. Fleeting Moments of Collectivity and Resilience

With this in mind, it is essential to return to the concept of snitching that this particularly agitated guard mentioned with respect to the window blind debacle. This is not a teacher asking a middle school classroom to identify the class trouble maker. This was a man who exerted full authority over both the daily comfort and longterm freedom of these women asking them to identify someone who had committed a relatively small transgression. However, with an unfaltering strength no one “snitched”. The act of not snitching does not physically involve much: a group of women sat silently for two minutes while being chastised and prodded for answers. However, this collective passivity and collective silence spoke volumes about the relationships that emerge in facing the guards.

Such specifically female moments of resistance when subjected to the power of an officer enabled to control daily life was also observed by Caputo in her work. I quote at length here in

order to appropriately represent the theoretical argument she had made in order to contextualize the responses of women to such flagrant displays of power. Caputo explains that,

“the theoretical argument I make in this book is that women’s experiences of oppression and resistance are linked over time and space. Even faced with repeated instances of victimization, subordination, and repression that harm the psyche, hinder social and economic growth, and affect personal relationships, women demonstrate a natural inclination to care for themselves. In their motivation and agency, they are able to direct their lives within their limitations, even if doing so means weather domination through internal strength or resorting to violence used against them. Moreover, acts of resistance empower women in these circumstances, but the uncertain consequences of resistance often lead to further oppression and domination” (p. 14, 2014)

This argument is particularly useful for understand the implications and motivations for the more subtle forms of women’s resistance that I observed while working at Helms. The limitations that were placed upon the women of Helms in terms of possible avenues of resistance were incredibly limited. Organized, collective resistance is not feasible and would only have been met with even stricter supervision and punitive measures. However, as was theorized by Caputo, internal strength and fleeting moments of collectivity amongst the women are evidence of quite powerful resistance given all of the factors that are working to degrade the autonomy of incarcerated women. Internal strength cannot be quantified in a setting like Helms. The rejection of the narratives that were promulgated about the women’s abilities to make choices for themselves, however, points to a resilient quality that allowed some women to a certain extent to prevent the internalization of those stigmatizing and detrimental narratives.

The demoralizing dynamic that exists between the women of Helms and the guards who supervise them is no mistake. It is critical to call to mind the fact that the prison system was designed under the guise of housing violent male criminals. Corrections officers are enculturated into a profession that adamantly believes the people who they are charged with supervising are

inherently dangerous. While this assumption is not unfounded and the violence that exists within prisons raises legitimate concerns about safety, the theoretical and structural organization of a prison designed to control the behavior of potentially violent men is inherently ill suited for the needs of pregnant women. Incarceration as a concept is a system that is designed not only to remove a person from society as a punishment and a mechanism of public safety, but it also assumes a degree of correction (Foucault, 1975). This necessarily implies that one must correct the piece of a human being that is inclined to commit crime, and the criminology literature that exists has no shortage of phrases such as, “mothers that chose to pursue criminal careers” (Enos, 2001). The idea of “corrections” suggests that somehow a person will be altered, the criminality amended and a civic duty or law abiding character restored (Foucault, 1975). This theoretical orientation is significant and useful to consider as a framing device, but it pales in comparison to the way the women of Helms explained to me how they experience power dynamics while incarcerated.

During an informal discussion after class, the grievances about guards once again arose. Emily was reflecting on an incident that had happened at the very end of the previous class. As the women were filing out of the room, a guard swooped in and told the women to put the desks back in rows as opposed to the circle I had arranged before class began. I told the guard this would not be necessary and that I was happy to put the desks back myself. His response was, “you see, I don’t spare ‘em.” The women had overhead this as they were leaving the room and Emily reintroduced it the following week. While discussing that moment Emily said, “I think they have a box on the application that says, ‘do you hate pregnant women?’ and if they say yes, then they get hired.” Other women began chiming in, explaining how guards that worked in

other facilities had treated them much more considerately in facilities that they had been transferred to briefly for logistical reasons. The women felt that in situations where their pregnancies were unique guards treated them with more sympathy and were more gentle. Having become accustomed to seeing pregnant women in prison, they felt the guards at Helms had become desensitized to the unique challenges they were facing and subsequently treated them as harshly as any other incarcerated person and with perhaps more scorn than they would have a non-pregnant woman.

In our discussion about navigating the stress caused by excessively negative interactions with guards, Caroline asserted that the problem was not with an individual guard but with the system itself. Caroline was unique in terms of her level of education, and she spoke in a way that distinctly marked the fact that this was her first period of incarceration, and she knew that it would only last a few months. Her commentary on the way she experienced the inculcation of and respective dearth of power while incarcerated was striking. The following was just one piece of a much larger discussion between her and the other women working to explain to me what it felt like to exist within this system. Caroline told me that, “jail and prison are a mental thing. They want to break you down and make you feel nothing.” This sense of fracture is essential to explore because she was not discussing shackles or the feeling of being surrounded by barbed wire. Caroline was describing a distinctly psychological phenomenon: the idea that she existed in a system that was intentionally designed to break her down and make her feel powerless. The powerlessness invoked by being in prison may in fact have utility in a prison of unusually violent men. For pregnant women to be struck with a constant and all-consuming feeling of nothingness

and powerlessness had profound implications for how they perceived of themselves as mothers and as humans.

D. Powerlessness at the Expense of Motherhood

When one integrates these ideas of intentional powerlessness into a concept of motherhood, the paradox of incarcerating mothers in the name of making them better citizens becomes quite clear. Recall for a moment that the purpose of the class these women were taking was to teach parenting skills, how to navigate pregnancy, and how to bond with one's children while incarcerated. The concept of parenting and good parenting skills is predicated on the idea that a woman has some degree of control over her children and a least a degree of moral authority in order to make good choices for herself and her family. How then is a woman to understand herself as a mother who should be actively making choices for her existing children and the child she is pregnant with and she is daily being told she is unfit to make decisions for herself? How is she to establish moral authority to help raise her children and contribute to their development when she exists in a system that by definition implies she has failed morally by committing a crime? Control, power, and moral authority are not only essential for an individual woman working to move through the world, but they are foundational concepts for keeping a family structure together. By undermining this aspect of familial organization, the prison system makes it nearly impossible for a woman to have enough power and autonomy to be the mother she would like to be.

The women of Caputo's half way house experienced a similar dynamic in their transition from jail or prison back into a community setting. As the women were working to transfer out of

a correctional facility, they were housed in an environment that burden their lives with rules and regulations to the extent that it actually served to reinforce the stigmatization of the women and increase their dependence on the resources provided by the halfway house (2014). In a halfway house as in prison, the patriarchal assumptions made about women's capabilities results in policies that directly undermine the ability of women to develop social resources, practical economic skills, or the skills to navigate the unhealthy environment that contributed to a woman's having become incarcerated to begin with.

It is certainly true that while prison organization may actively work to fracture individuals and to prevent the formation of community, friendships and small groups certainly do emerge. I do not wish to create a picture of incarceration that denies entirely the existence of these relationships. Unfortunately, one of the limitations of this project is that I was constrained to classroom interactions, and the format of the class did not allow me to observe these relationships, nor was I told about the existence of such friendships. I have chosen to focus here on the disintegration of community as opposed to the establishment of smaller close knit groups not because they do not exist but because it is not what was emphasized during our group discussions.

The power exerted upon the women in order to create a feeling of nothingness and to prevent the formation of strong communal identities is a critical element to explore when constructing what it feels like to be a pregnant mother in prison. I feel certain that within the social groupings of the women themselves there are more nuanced and complex power structures than the simple us versus them dynamic that arises in interactions with guards. However, the nuances of social hierarchy amongst pregnant women themselves and then among the women

who return to the general population after delivery are beyond the scope of this thesis. Teaching a class directly shapes the content of the conversations that are had. Given that I was teaching a prenatal class and was interested in the experience of pregnant and motherhood our class discussion revolved around these topics and left little time for a discussion about social hierarchy.

Class discussion of non-pregnancy specific related material also became more restricted as time went on and my ability to contribute to class was curbed by a co-teacher who was acting in the best interest of MBB. This woman was a healthcare professional who had dedicated her life to maternal and child health; her contributions to women's healthcare in hospital settings have been substantial, and I do not doubt that she wanted the women in class to be well and have healthful lives. She was, however, more dedicated to the longevity of MBB than the individual women in the class. As a result, after I had explained some of the healthcare concerns that the women had told me about a week previously, she dedicated a section of class to explain to the women why their healthcare concerns were not valid. Her intention was likely to assuage some of their fears and to quell what she perceived to be a diplomatic problem that I had facilitated between MBB and the institution sanctioned discourse for the class. Unfortunately, it was a moment that very closely resembled a condescending meeting the women had been made to participate in a week prior.

A week previously, the women had told me of a speech that the administrators and healthcare staff had made the women listen to. The take away message that the women had from this meeting was roughly, "you are lucky to be here and should be grateful that you are receiving the quality of care that you are. Stop complaining." When my co-teacher, who was far more

senior to me in the organizational structure, in essence restating the exact speech that the prison institution had promoted earlier, she evoked the exact same power structure that exists outside of class time within our classroom. She was certainly a qualified and well intentioned healthcare professional but in recreating the exact same power dynamic that diminishes the women's valid healthcare concerns throughout the prison, she created a rift between MBB volunteers and the women they were there to work with. The women's response to this was well articulated in a quippy retort from Rosie. After the speech by my co-teacher, Rosie raised her hand and said, "No one is responding to you because what you're saying isn't true." Rosie was consistently outspoken, but in this moment her ability to resist and defy institutional norms rang clear.

Imbalanced power dynamics are not always as distinct as the relationship between guard and incarcerated woman. While it is quite clear that the status degradation marked by wearing a uniform and being kept in a cell creates a stark power imbalance, oppression can occur in much more insidious ways. Having your healthcare concerns invalidated by a volunteer medical professional, not being allowed to access one's own medication, be required to have permission to go outside or eat a meal are small ways in which power imbalances accumulate. For the women at Helms the power exerted by the officers charged with their supervision was perceived as the most aggressive violation of their autonomy and humanity and thus is worthy of dedicating a more lengthy analysis to it.

One last essential power structure to note is the existence of the prison industrial complex. While it does not explain the specific manifestations of power dynamics for an incarcerated woman, one would be remiss to do a criminal justice analysis without dedicating at least a small piece to the prison industrial complex. The existence of the prison industrial

complex offers some of the most black and white examples of the way a structure can exert power upon a person and constrain individual choice. In the United States alone, the business of prisons is a nearly \$60 billion industry (Drucker, 2013). Currently for every person incarcerated, the prison industrial complex employs a full-time counterpart (Drucker, 2013). The portion of public funds that are used to fund the enormously costly industry are pulled from the budgets for other public services (Freudenberg, 2001). In the communities where low income and minority families have been concentrated, funds are systematically disinvested from social goods and used instead for building more prisons, expanding law enforcement, and paying the private business that have begun to take control of the correctional industry (Drucker, 2013). Drucker cites a referendum in California in which a proposed budget that would reallocate money earmarked for the prison industry to drug treatment programs and alternative sentencing was struck down; this budget was struck down by California voters largely because the prison industrial complex supports so many jobs and is a way to bring public funds to more rural communities (Drucker, 2013).

For the prison industrial complex, every person incarcerated represents a potential profit; every person rerouted to alternative sentencing or treatment is a loss. The laws and proposed budgets that have so clearly disinvested from low-income communities no longer include explicitly racist language because they do not need to. The creation of urban centers that consisted almost exclusively of minority families has tacitly allowed legislators and politicians to assert that investing in the criminal justice system and the prison industrial complex is a more appropriate use of funds than investing in health care, education, job training, and drug treatment (Drucker, 2013). Communities that received little attention from law enforcement before the era

of the War on Drugs have become the focus of intense police scrutiny (Maurer, 1999). This piece is important to address when considering the power dynamic that exists between a woman at Helms and the guard who supervises her because it is an important part of the life histories of many incarcerated women. Having been tossed about by an industry that lobbies for increased incarceration as a source of profit, low income women are disempowered and excluded from conversations about the forces that act to fundamentally change their lived experiences.

I do not profess to have identified all of the power relationships that bound a mother's actions and experiences while incarcerated; I have simply identified what I was consistently told was the most distressing of the power imbalances that pregnant women in prison face. Hopefully what I have outline above illustrates the idea that the power wielded by prison guards both male and female can have a profound impact on not only the individual but also the collective formation of the group's experience. However, this power dynamic is far more complex than a simple marker of relative status, and it has a profound effect on the actual experience of motherhood and identity. Working to make sense of an experience of motherhood and pregnancy governed by lack of power, the prevalence of fear due to both a history of physical and current perceived violence, and a reconfigured social environment is the constant burden of incarcerated mothers. While this effort may not be exerted in any explicitly stated way, it was understood by the women of Helms that this was not an insignificant part of their sentences.

6. Individuality and the Basis of Community

A. The Boundaries of Community

Women who are incarcerated while pregnant face a rather remarkable set of circumstances. Not only do they find themselves warehoused in an institution that was initially designed for violent men with no regard for the healthcare needs of pregnant women, they find themselves in a system that conceptualizes their behavior as if they were violent men. The early years of anthropology sought to discuss culture tied to specific geographic locations. One might talk about the culture of an entire ethnic group in one homogenizing swoop. As the field has evolved the scope of ethnographies has become much more specific. One might talk about the culture of a specific college campus or the meaning of childhood for children growing up in Harlem. However, even as the notion that physical spaces can represent homogenous cultures has dissipated, the notion that an anthropologist can travel somewhere to study culture has persisted. When I first envisioned this project I imagined that it would be possible for me to study motherhood and community within a single prison. However, not only does engaging with culture usually involve a certain degree of voluntary participation but also that the organization of correctional facilities themselves seeks to prevent the formation of community.

If, as previously mentioned, the simple fact of shared existence within the physical structure of the prison is not enough to create community, this begs the question of what defines the boundaries of community for incarcerated mothers. There are two ways in which the circumstances of incarceration actively contribute to the disintegration of community: the first pertains to the rejection of “inmate” as identity on an individual level and the second relates to the nature and purpose of incarceration explored earlier within the context of power dynamics.

However despite the forces that work against the formation of community within prisons one can still identify moments of collectivity and loyalty amongst the women.

One of the frequent recommendations of the MBB curriculum was that the women rely on each other as a support network. The logic of the curriculum, which was akin to my own when I initiated this project, assumes that a group of people who are living together under unusually challenging circumstances will naturally form a network of support and community. Anyone who seeks to teach or work with incarcerated women, no matter how well intentioned, can never truly empathize but can only offer support and sympathy. This reality undergirds the logic of telling the women to rely on each other as resources and points of true empathy or compassion. Unfortunately, this conclusion is one that had been arrived at without asking incarcerated women about the nature of interpersonal dynamics while in prison. The trope that exists in popular culture about incredibly strong or intense networks within prisons, perhaps divided along racial lines, is one that has been based on the male experience and fails to recognize how dramatically different incarceration is for women.

One of the key ways in which female incarceration is different from male incarceration has to do with the amount of time that women spend on average in prison or jail per sentence. Given that women are so rarely convicted of violent crimes, on average they serve significantly shorter sentences than their male counterparts. Certainly mandatory minimum sentencing altered this dynamic to a certain extent, but, in general, women who are incarcerated expect to be able to return to their communities in the near future. This means that they enter jail or prison knowing that this period of their life is necessarily time bound. When every day brings a woman one step closer to her release date, the incentive to form a strong community within the prison dissolves.

This is particularly true for the women at Helms, who at absolute maximum, can expect to stay with this particular group of women for nine months. After delivery, a member of this group of women can be sent to one of a handful of facilities meaning that even if she is serving a longer sentence, there is little reason to form bonds with women whom she will very likely be separated from after delivery.

However, even for the rare woman who is serving a longer sentence, the desire to form close friendships appeared minimal. For the handful of women in class that were expecting to serve sentences on the order of five or more years, there seemed to be a sense that their experiences were objectively more grave. After one session in which I suggested the women use each other as resources, Lexi, who was expecting to serve a five year sentence, said she had little interest in hearing about the struggles of women who could expect to be released and reunited in six months or a year. For her, these women, who were so clearly transient figures in her life, were not her responsibility to look after or care for. Lexi did not feel that the struggles experienced by women who expected to be released soon were insignificant, she just had little interest in being the shoulder to cry on when she herself was mentally preparing for missing at least the first four and a half years of her child's life. This impatience for the woes of the other women was not exclusive to the women who were anticipating long sentences.

Understandably, for many women at Helms, listening to the struggles of someone else was something that was almost too energetically demanding to be accommodated. Pregnancy is not easy on any woman's body, for women who are incarcerated while pregnant with little to no control over their sleep hygiene or diet, the stressors of pregnancy are particularly pronounced. After having suggested that the women ask each other for tips about how to stay comfortable at

night in order to get a better night's sleep, I was quite clearly told that I was misinterpreting the situation. Lexi, justifiably exasperated at my lack of understanding told me that, "when you don't feel good, its hard to listen to other people say they don't feel good." This thought had not occurred to me. In suggesting that the women look to each other for resources, I had assumed that someone was always feeling well enough to extend care and support to the women around her. What I had failed to recognize was that if everyone is feeling chronically unwell, coping with their own struggles, and more often than not managing the symptoms of their own depression and anxiety, it is not feasible to expend extra energy ensuring the women around you feel supported.

B. Socialization and Diversity

This may strike someone outside the prison system as counterintuitive, much as it did the volunteers of MBB. If one returns to Gail Caputo's model, the disintegration of community in favor of individuality emerges as quite theoretically logical. Caputo's discussion of agency, which will become even more illustrative in the following chapter, begins here to add clarity to the individualism that pervaded at Helms. Caputo, "argued that agency, understood as the motivation to act on one's own behalf under conditions of control, requires personal accountability" (p. 20, 2014). By tying agency to a desire to work on one's own behalf one can see how for the women of Helms individuality may become more meaningful than it is for the non-incarcerated person. In a system that actively works to diminish one's agency, the ways in which women are able to reclaim a sense of personhood manifest themselves as actions taken

specifically on one's own behalf. Given the particularly narrow scope of choices that women in prison can make for themselves, actions that allow for a sense of agency take on new meaning.

Caputo goes on to discuss the ways in which individuality is a manifestation of resistance (2014). She states that, "the individual's subjective assessment of oppression, her intent in acting against it, and her resistance behavior are the most important markers for qualifying action as resistance" (p. 20, 2014). In this case, assertion of individuality and agency is not only cathartic in a system that seeks to strip one of such qualities but it is also an act of resistance; it confers power and reverses the power imbalance that is stacked against women in all aspects of the criminal justice system.

This is not to say that the women at Helms have no affection for each other; there are certainly a handful of friendships and bonds that are formed between two or three women, and I never witnessed open hostility towards other members of the group. This being said, for many women there did appear to be an active resistance to the idea that all of the women at Helms should naturally be friendly given their very similar experiences. The women of Helms took issue not with the idea that community could potentially be beneficially but with the idea that their experiences were in fact similar, that they could be homogenized into a single type of woman. When one begins to consider the diversity of the population at Helms, this does seem reductionist, if not outright foolish. Given that Helms is a facility that provides specialized medical care, women from all over Georgia are sent here.

While a single southern American state may not seem like a highly diverse population, consider for a moment the discrete worlds of rural Appalachia and urban Atlanta. Layer into the equation the pervasive racism that exists within the justice system and how that differentially

effects Black and Latina women. Mix into the equation varying sentences lengths: some women in class expected to be released before delivery, others anticipated missing the first five years of her child's life. The age range of the mothers in class often hovered between early twenties and early forties, with older mothers more likely to have more dependent children at home. Over the course of one class, Lexi continued to correct me when I suggested that the simple fact of being incarcerated while pregnant made their individual experiences highly relatable. Simple as it may have been, when Lexi responded to my having implied a homogeneity within the group with, "We are all different people. We have different situations." I realized then that I was reducing this group of women to the single identifier of incarcerated person, without paying attention to all of the factors that made the members of this group so distinct.

C. Stigmatization and the Rejection of Collectivity

The reductionist ideas inherent in the suggestion that these women would necessarily understand each other's struggles was flawed not only because it ignored the diversity that existed among them, but also because it represented an act of labeling that many of the women actively resisted. In the United States, when a person is convicted of a crime, long after she finishes serving her time, she is still labeled a criminal. For a handful of women who are convicted of a relatively minor crime for the first time, they may have their records expunged. For most women, however, the status of "criminal" will follow them for the rest of their lives and "convict" quickly becomes a woman's master status. Caputo found a very similar situation in her work with post-release women in the halfway house. She notes that, "stigmatizing labeling influences how women are socially presented and affects how they interact with others, how they

experience the world, and how they see themselves” (p. 193, 2014). She found that the even though all of the women she was working with had been grouped under the same stigmatized label, this did not yield unity but led to “beefs” and occasionally into intragroup violence.

There was one moment in which the impact of labeling emerged particularly clearly during class. Many women refrained from sharing the nature of their crime with me during group discussions. The women who had been incarcerated because of parole or probation violations were much more open. I suspect that this was because even within the category of “convict,” there attempts to distance oneself from the label by creating subcategories that were somehow less stigmatizing. The only evidence for this comes from a quick aside from Caroline during discussion. While emphasizing to me the importance of not lumping all the women at Helms into one category, Caroline with a subtle air of disdain stated that, “we’re not all here for drugs and shit like that.” Her implication was clear; even within this group of women, there was a value judgment about a woman who would be convicted of a drug related crime while pregnant. As she brushed past this and did not chose to elaborate upon this point, it is hard to know how precisely this process of intra-group stigmatization is realized. However, it is important to note that it exists and is the result of an attempt to create distance between oneself and the most intense forms of stigmatization that occur both outside and within the walls of a prison.

The assumption that women who are incarcerated can relate to each other simply because a series of legal proceedings has resulted in their being housed in the same facility, one reenacts all of the same reductionist labeling that happens when a woman is released and labeled a “convict.” As the women began to understand my personal position on many aspects of the criminal justice system, I heard much more push-back whenever I suggested that their

experiences were fundamentally similar. It became clear that no woman wants her most salient identity to be criminal. The women's rejection of criminal as their most salient identity means that this cannot serve as the basis of community. By creating as much distance as possible between the concept of self and the label of convict, the women of Helms create distance between themselves as well: privileging what makes them unique and rejecting the homogeneity imposed upon them.

This tendency towards individualism works hand in hand with the actual intentions and policies of an American prison or jail. American jails are certainly not places that are designed to foster community. From the perspective of prison administrators and corrections officers, community among incarcerated people represents a distinct threat. Again, it is critical to remember that these institutions were designed primarily to house men convicted of violent crimes, people who must be separated from society in order to protect the populace. From this perspective, it is a matter of safety and maintaining order that motivates the actions of corrections officers and the rules that they enforce. Women's facilities are so few and far between because women compose such a small fraction of the total population of incarcerated people. As a result, women are frequently housed in a separate wing of larger male facilities. Guards who may alternate between guarding women and men are trained and socialized to be ever cognizant of potential dangers. If one believes that he or she is charged with supervising a group of dangerous criminals, it seems clear that encouraging them to join together, particularly when inmates so dramatically outnumber the guards would be seen as disadvantageous.

While all of the above is true for corrections in general, there is something unique about Helms as a correctional facility. As mentioned previously, as a pregnant woman, one can expect

to spend an absolute maximum of nine months at Helms. As a result there is a significant degree of turn over in this facility. Every week during class there were a handful of new members and a handful of women who were anticipating due dates within the next three weeks. This likely explains part of the reason why group cohesion never truly emerges. Turnover in itself can be detrimental, but borrowing again from Caputo's work analyzing individuality and resistance the relatively short time spent at Helms actually creates a second problem. Caputo noted that the most senior members of the halfway house community were the ones who socialized newer members. She observed that it was during this socialization process that senior members of the community taught newcomers methods of resistance. To apply this same theoretical logic to the group of women at Helms is speculative, it makes a great deal of sense, particularly considering that this is a population of women quite similar to those at Helms; they were simply further along in the post-release process.

D. Inklings of Collectivity

When one considers all of these factors together, institutional structures that seek to minimize collectivity, individual rejection of convict as master status, the significant diversity, the relative brevity of the period of incarceration, it becomes clear that the obstacles to community far out number factors that support it. This being said, while incarcerated the women at Helms are forced to share certain experiences. To a certain degree collectivity is forced upon them because within the eyes of the prison system they are not individuals. These women, donning uniforms that bear other people's names, are interchangeable convicts within the purview of the larger criminal justice system.

Where one begins to see some form of community emerge is in opposition to institutional policies and subtle, passive resistance to the guards. Recall for a moment, the window shade debacle and that guard who huffed out of the room after declaring that he knew the women would not snitch on each other. Community is typically understood based on the factors that bind it together from within. Networks are formed out of shared interests or needs; they come with the sense that a group of individuals voluntarily bound together can operate on scales that individuals cannot achieve alone. While there are always in-groups and out-groups, those that clearly do not belong to the core community, rarely is the defining quality of a Group A the fact that they are not members of Group B. However, for the women of Helms their most salient collective identity emerges from the fact that they are not members of the dominant group. Their collectivity is defined not by some sort of mutual affinity for each other but by the fact that they are not guards or administrators.

Creating a collective group around the concept that they are not guards provides significantly more strength and empowerment than labeling based on the fact that these women are all “convicts” housed in the same facility. This understanding of group dynamics does not call into question one’s master status. One can identify as “not a guard” without sacrificing the qualities of personhood that make each woman and her lived experiences unique. This can explain why when one woman was threatened by a guard during the window shade debacle, everyone acted to protect her: the guard was not a part of their group. However, such an understanding of community allows for a much more sensible reading of statements that I heard time and again such as, “it’s almost impossible to find someone to listen to sincerely.” The solidarity extended to Sasha when she risked being somehow sanctioned by a guard is not

extended to a woman going through the same daily struggles and discomforts. However, when one understands that shared experience only truly matters when it is the direct result of a guard interfering in daily life these statements make perfect sense.

The power structure of prison, the definition of identity and individuality, and the basis of community in prison alone do not allow us to understand how pregnancy and motherhood in prison are experienced. These pieces are fundamental to a clear understanding of motherhood because the state of motherhood does not occur in a vacuum and all of these individual factors directly inform how a woman who is pregnant in prison understands herself as a mother and as a human. With the above examples and frameworks in mind, it is necessary to weave these pieces together to present, with irrefutable constraints, a more complete picture of motherhood in prison.

7. Motherhood in Prison

A. Maternal Child Separation

All of the women who participated in class, with the exception of one woman, had at least one young child at home. For the women at Helms, this pregnancy was not their first foray into motherhood and therefore it was not only this pregnancy that was stressful, but they were also working through the reality of being separated from dependent children. As a teacher of a prenatal class, my purpose was supposed to be to guide the conversations about navigating the system of incarceration while pregnant. However, given how much time we spent discussing the children at home and what would happen to this baby after delivery, it is clear that to reduce the conversation about motherhood simply to the issues of this pregnancy would miss a dramatic portion of the women's experiences. This is not to say that the particular experiences of pregnancy in prison are not deserving of significant exploration.

Before I fully dive into the discussion of motherhood in prison, it is important to point out that this will not be a theoretically oriented description of motherhood itself. There is an enormous body of theoretical research from sociologists, women's studies scholars, psychologists, etc. While this research would be exceptionally useful if the intent of this paper were to present a robust model of motherhood in prison, that is not the purpose here. The most important thinkers on this issue are the women of Helms themselves. I have chosen not to ground what the women of Helms explained to me an intensely theoretical discussion of motherhood because the purpose here is to give airtime to their individual experiences. Certainly what follows is a non-organic narrative that I have pieced together, but my hope is that this will

provide some insight into motherhood as it exists for these women without attempting to graft their embodied realities on to existing theoretical models of the meaning of motherhood.

The first step to understanding the experience of motherhood in prison is to acknowledge the impact that forced separation from children has on mothers. This separation of mother and child is one of the best examples of the ways in which a prison system designed for violent, male criminals fails to meet the needs of women and their families. In the case of the women at Helm's, they will experience separation in two rather distinct ways. The first degree of separation occurs, as one might imagine, the day a woman is sent to jail or prison. The second separation occurs when a mother is separated from the child she had been carrying while incarcerated only 24 hours after delivery to be returned back to a correctional facility. As a teacher, acknowledging and honoring this second human being and the maternal child relationship was a fraught ethical dilemma. Given the scope of the class and the fact that it was officially a parenting class, it was clear that there should be an element about bonding and encouraging ways that these women could feel connected to their babies before they had to give them up after delivery. However, there was something that felt cruel about fostering this connection knowing it would soon be severed in a rather traumatizing way.

During class while trying to unpack the reality of what the women imagined the first days postpartum would be like, one of my co-teachers asked the women how they anticipated they might feel during those first few hours. Expressing a sentiment that was quickly echoed by other women in class, Katie, due in just a few weeks, said, "I think I am going to feel empty." A quiet hum of agreement flitted around the room as the women contemplated just how this feeling of emptiness would manifest. Melissa chimed in, "I think I am going to be crying all over the

place.” Tina, who was due within the next two weeks followed with, “I don’t know. It just feels like he’s always existed.” Taken together, these comments create a picture of those first postpartum days as being defined by emptiness, unyielding sadness, and loss. It is important to recall in this moment that the vast majority of incarcerated women already struggle with anxiety and depression. When one wraps this postpartum separation into the experience, the exceptionally negative consequences for a woman’s well being loom large and the potential for postpartum depression emerge in a particularly salient way. When this separation is coupled with the logic that pervades the criminal justice system, which is that a person who commits a crime deserve to be subjected to the harsh realities of incarceration, the resulting logic is that a woman deserves to be separated from her child because she has committed a crime.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, a phrase rang throughout crime and punishment discourse, “If you do the crime you do the time.” It implied a strict, scrupulous, universal approach to crime and punishment. This sentiment of strict crime and punishment was the political fuel that drove, “The War on Drugs,” which brought with it a new era of mandatory minimum sentences and more rigorous drug enforcement policies starting in the early 1980s. Theoretically, it is a model that makes good, legal sense: it, supposedly, removes bias in sentencing; it implies that anyone who commits a crime will serve the same prescribed time. It follows from a logic that presupposes if one commits a crime, that decision is made with full agency and awareness of the consequences. What such a judicial model fails to acknowledge, however, is that long before sentencing occurs there is ample time for discretion and bias. Most importantly, the logic underpinning this legal framework fails to understand the myriad

socioeconomic, cultural, and political factors that play a role in an individual's decision to commit a crime to begin with.

The American criminal justice system is one that is uniquely dependent upon the brick and mortar institutions of prisons and jails. It is predicated upon the idea that people who deviate from the proscribed laws are social deviants, best handled by being separated from society and punished by being kept in a cage with others of his or her kind (Drucker, 2013). One is theoretically punished for a crime because one freely and willingly chose to violate the law of the land. At its face, the basic crime and punishment logic seems relatively commonsensical. However, if one applies the theory of Lumpen Abuse as described by Bourgois and Schonberg to this understanding of crime, it soon begins to crumble. Bourgois and Schonberg derived their theory of Lumpen Abuse in order to better understand the dichotomy of structure and agency (2009).

As opposed to the binary of structure and agency, Bourgois and Schonberg instead offer a model that integrates ethnographic techniques and analysis of larger scale structural forces, which they define to include the political, economic, institutional, and cultural forces of a society (2009). Their model is predicated on the notion that ethnography is incomplete without an understanding of larger, structural forces at play. Particularly when addressing disadvantaged communities, "close ethnographic exploration of suffering must address its social distribution" (Bourgois & Schonberg, p. 16, 2009). As previously noted, an attention to structural forces and the violence that they can inflict sheds a critical light on the implications that apparently logical and unbiased policies have on real lived experiences. With this idea in mind, it is necessary to more fully explore the realities of maternal-child separation.

Taking the separation that exists between mother and child, both those born while incarcerated and those at home, as an unavoidable element of incarceration, the women of Helms must then begin to adjust to this life⁵. For a variety of logistical and bureaucratic reasons, I was not able to follow up with the women who had been in class after delivery. I cannot speak here to what specifically the coping mechanisms are that allow a woman to handle the forced separation from her newborn. However, I would like to briefly draw attention to the idea that both woman and newborn must adjust to life without each other; separation must become the norm. I can only speculate the challenges this creates for a family when a woman is eventually released and all members must readapt to a new family structure and defy the norm that mother and baby have existed in thus far.

B. Manifestations of Symbolic Violence

Throughout the lesson plans that I was supplied with, one of the most frequent themes that appeared involved encouraging women to stay in touch with their children and strategies for bonding not only with the babies they were currently carrying but also with their children “on the outside.” However, I soon learned that the strategies that were suggested by the curriculum for bonding with one’s children were unfeasible for a number of different reasons. Our most basic recommendation encouraged women to make use of their voices as one of the only things that could transcend the walls of the prison. One can not only read or talk to the baby while pregnant,

⁵ This separation need not be inevitable at all. A handful of institutions with “prison nurseries” have shown remarkable success with programs that allow mothers and young children to stay together during the period of incarceration.

but phone calls home could allow women to stay in touch children, provided the mother had a reliable way to contact a child which is frequently not the case if a child is in foster care.

This suggestion presumes that phone calls do not represent a significant financial burden. Calls from a family member inside prison can be extremely expensive, especially when one contextualizes the fees associated with phone calls within the typical family that is subject to such fees. More often than not, a woman's mother becomes the primary care giver for her dependent children when she becomes incarcerated. Having likely been incarcerated for a drug related crime or a crime of survival, one might extrapolate that excess financial resources were not available given the nature of crimes of survival. Additionally, when a woman becomes incarcerated, whatever income or resources she was able to provide for her family are no longer available. Grandmothers then become responsible for in some cases upwards of three or four, dependent children in the absence of the resources that had previously be contributed by the now incarcerated mother. It is not uncommon for phone providers to require a monthly deposit for anyone receiving calls from a prison before the usual per minute rate for each phone call. It is clear the simple suggestion that a woman speak to her children as often as possible is one that pays no heed to the significant financial burden this imposes.

This phone call policy is not one that is intended to degrade the integrity of incarcerated women's families, but it does have that effect. While there are elements of the policy itself that are structurally violent, the MBB teaching that phone calls are a good way to stay in touch is not necessarily structurally violent; it is however, a suggestion that entirely ignores the complications that exist when one integrates a model of structure and agency into the experience of incarceration. Bourgois and Schonberg assert that, for the community they studied, the small

forces and policies can collectively exert violence upon members of a society. Their understanding of violence, however, is not necessarily physical but runs a continuum and includes structural and symbolic components (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009). They do include structural violence and take it to mean, “how the political economic organization of a society wreaks havoc on vulnerable categories of people” ((Bourgois & Schonberg, p. 17, 2009).

In this case their discussion of symbolic violence is perhaps more illustrative. Symbolic violence is a construct that describes the way in which hegemonic social constructs are internalized and interpreted as the natural order of things. Bourgois and Schonberg state that, “through symbolic violence, inequalities are made to appear common sensical, and they reproduce themselves pre-consciously” (p.17, 2009). While carefully analyzing the day to day lived experiences and actions of individuals, Bourgois and Schonberg apply the concepts of structural and symbolic violence to understand the way in which individual agency is necessarily constrained by the structures of his or her environment (2009). While their model was constructed to understand the lives of people who use drugs, it lends itself quite nicely to understanding incarceration.

If one is to apply this theoretical framework to the experience of motherhood while incarcerated, it is necessary to first identify the structural forces that are at work both leading up to arrest and while incarcerated. There are some that seem obvious: mandatory minimum sentences, criminal justice practices that shape drug use and abuse as a criminal practice and not a health issue, and a theory of correction that demands a lack of agency (Drucker, 2013). However, these structures are theoretically universal in their application. In his analysis of mass incarceration as an epidemic, Ernest Drucker says that the key to any epidemic is, “Location.

Location. Location” (2013). By this he means, in order to understand the transmission of any disease it is necessary to understand the ecology of the environment in which it is spreading. If one is to understand mass incarceration within his metaphor, an individual who is incarcerated has been infected. Drucker takes Bourgois and Schonberg’s construct of Lumpen Abuse a step further and asserts that there is almost no individual agency that plays a role in one’s having been incarcerated. While at first this might seem like a bit of an over-reach, if one continues to focus on the structural forces at play it begins to become clear that the forces have a greater impact on individual choice than one might at first imagine.

Drucker offers instead of a structure-agency dialectic, the notion of incarceration as an epidemic, a disease tearing through low income and minority communities throughout (2013). Incarceration mirrors the properties of an epidemic on three levels: it has a rapid growth rate; it is operating on a very large scale; it is self-sustaining (Drucker, 2013). While the first two principles are uncontroversial, the notion that mass incarceration is self-sustaining requires a more detailed analysis. To explain the self sustaining nature of mass incarceration, Drucker offers a model that considers: the administration of the criminal justice system, minimum mandatory and longer overall sentences, rules governing release and reentry, damage done to families and communities, and the impact of the prison industrial complex. Within Bourgois and Schonberg’s model of Lumpen abuse these would be the specific structures at play that are constraining individual choice leading up to incarceration. While incarcerated the factors include the organization of the prison healthcare system, prevailing theories of corrections, the day-to-day rules of the prison, and the threat of violence that pervades daily guard-prisoner interactions.

This leads to analysis of set another symbolically violent suggestion promoted by MBB for maternal child bonding. One of the most common pieces of advice included having children visit whenever possible in order to uphold the more intimate bonds that can be formed in person. However, during class discussion, it once again became clear that this suggestion was unpalatable at best and in fact impossible for many women and their families. Many of the women who were held at Helms had lived hours away from this facility before incarceration. The dearth of facilities that are available for women who are incarcerated means that they are frequently held in one of the very few women's facilities in a state, which can be extremely far from her original community. If we take Tina and her family as an example one can begin to see why distance in itself poses such a significant imposition. Tina's mother had chosen not to visit her while she was pregnant in this facility to save resources for visits after she had delivered her baby. She anticipated, although she could not be certain, that after delivery she would be transferred to a prison that was a little over four hours away from where her mother and her son would be living.

In order for Tina to be able to have a visit her son, her mother would have to drive four hours alone with an infant, not counting the stops needed for feeding and diaper changes. After what would have to be inevitably a brief visit, considering visiting hours end at 3pm, Tina's mother would either have to drive what would likely be the at least five hours back home or find a place to stay somewhere nearby. When one suggests maintaining a connection through visits as frequently as possible, one clearly overlooks the fact what must happen is either a grandmother spending ten hours driving alone with an infant in one day or a family already struggling to make ends meet spending money on a hotel room in order to facilitate that visit.

The distance imposed upon a woman and her children both literally and metaphorically represent a fundamental challenge to a woman's ability to be the type of mother she wishes she could be. However, even when visitation is feasible many women choose not to have their children visit. When discussing the possibilities of visitation as a group, one of the mothers, Caroline, who had not been incarcerated since she had become a mom to her three year old son, asked the other mothers how they felt about visitation. An interesting dynamic emerged that was indicative of the struggle that characterizes incarcerated motherhood. The women with more experience mothering while incarcerated suggest that if it were possible for very young children to visit, this would be a good opportunity of mother-child bonding. However, there was strong resistance to visits from a woman's older children. Older children understand what it means for someone to be arrested and sent to jail; older children would remember what it felt like to be searched by and to interact with a corrections officer; older children would see their mothers in prison uniforms, unable to make decisions for themselves let alone make decisions for their children.

C. Parenting from Prison

This loss of control as an individual and as a mother was well explained by Caroline who said that, "It is a prison, but we are all adults. It shouldn't be daycare." The purpose of MBB was to develop parenting skills and foster a set of skills that allowed mothers to be and perceive of themselves as good mothers. However, as Caroline pointed out, these women existed in a system that treated them as if they were children themselves. The idea of developing parenting skills in prison begins to seem almost paradoxical when one considers the fact that the dominant idea of

prison is that a person has failed to make good choices, therefore all her choices will be made for her. Once a woman is then released from the system that has worked to engrain dependence and subservience, the system in which she has been treated as a child herself, she is expected to return to a family and assume very serious adult responsibilities. When one considers the idea that the women at Helms are made to feel as if they are children themselves, it begins to become quite reasonable why visits by older children are frequently resisted. This is yet another example of the ways in which the regulations of the prison and the stigma of incarceration serve to inflict symbolic violence upon those within its purview.

For the women at Helms physical visitations with their older children were often more bitter than sweet. They of course understood that their children knew they were incarcerated. However, there was a sense that when the children were kept at a distance one did not have to directly address the fact that during this time their most dominant identifier was a convict, not as a mother. Women worried that to have a child visit would change the way they understood them as mothers. While much of the literature has argued that children will feel more at ease having seen that their mothers are safe and still invested in their lives. The women at Helms felt that their children would be disheartened seeing their mothers in uniforms being constantly reminded of the limits of engagement and touch that are applied to all people visiting incarcerated people regardless of whether or not they are mother and child. Not only did the mothers at Helms fear it would be disheartening for their children to see them under these circumstances but they also worried about what their children might think of them.

Mothers who are incarcerated are often considered the archetype of the bad parent. In fact, in many states there are ways in which mothering while poor is a crime in and of itself. For

example, it is not illegal to have drugs in one's system. While physical possession of illicit drugs is always illegal, under normal circumstances having consumed drugs is not. However, if a woman has drugs in her system while she is pregnant, it is possible to be convicted of child endangerment. If a woman who has a substance abuse disorder suffers a stillbirth, it is not unprecedented for her to be arrested for manslaughter. While the constitutionality of these cases has been overturned at times, they represent a larger cultural narrative that exists in the United States about the rules and responsibilities of motherhood. The woman who finds herself in jail, separated from her children is made to feel a particular brand of shame and guilt. The woman who finds herself incarcerated while pregnant takes on new amplifications of this culturally imposed understanding of herself as a bad mother. For the women at Helms, visitation by older children did not represent a potential moment of warmth and bonding, but was instead seen as an opportunity for their children to see them as the prototype of bad moms. The fear that their children would believe the narrative that incarcerated mothers are necessarily failures discouraged many women from encouraging their children to visit on the rare occasions where it would have been possible for them to do so.

Unfortunately, many women remained unaware of the long lasting legal implications that creating distance between oneself and her children can have while incarcerated. While many women self impose distance between themselves and their children while incarcerated in order to protect their children from the realities of life in prison and to prevent themselves from being seen as more inmate than mother, the American legal system views this choice very differently. The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 was originally written to protect children and provide stable housing if they were growing up in unsafe or tumultuous circumstances. A

key clause of the ASFA states that if a parent does not have custody of a child for 15 out of the previous 22 months, parental rights can be terminated and the child can be adopted. There are no exceptions to this clause for parents who are incarcerated who would otherwise have custody of their children. This clause is not always enacted when the necessary month stipulations are met, however, the factors that make it more likely for parental rights to be terminated frequently coalesce in the case of incarcerated mothers.

One of the key factors that is taken into consideration when the state decides to terminate parental rights is whether or not a mother appears to have been actively engaged as a parent during her incarceration. The state will look specifically at records of calls home and visitor logs in order to determine if it seems that a mother is still invested in her child's well being. If a child is in foster care, the state considers active engagement with the assigned social worker a key sign of a mother's commitment to her child or children. However, many women find that engaging with social workers can be intimidating at best and often logistically very challenging. Incarcerated women are often not explicitly told that attempting to make contact with the social worker is considered critical and that failure to do so will be used as evidence of their apathy or negligence. Frequently after class, women would ask questions regarding the logistics of this system. The rules remained opaque to them; they were baffled and terrified to be dealing with child services for their children on the outside while trying to make sense of being a mother to the child they were currently pregnant with. I constantly found myself leaving class with a list of legal questions to google and learn about, hoping to be able to provide some clarity at next week's class. What is often interpreted by the state as behavior that is indicative of poor parenting or lack of caring and love is more often than not the result of a simple financial

limitation or the heartfelt attempts of a mother to protect herself and her children from the idea that she is an inmate before she is a mother.

If one returns to Drucker's model of incarceration as a plague, the implications for women and their children are quite interesting. If maternal incarceration understood as a plague instead of the logical legal fallout of power individual decision making, how is one to understand the health outcomes of such a plague for a mother and her family? Time spent in prison itself can be considered a disability. Every year roughly half a million people who were incarcerated are released back into the community (Freudenberg, 2001). A person might quite likely be returned to a community where job opportunities were already scarce and now she bears the burden of carrying a felony conviction (Maurer, 1999). A person is further debilitated by a history of incarceration by the litany of federal and state laws that prohibit people with felony drug convictions from utilizing federal assistance in the form of food stamps or section eight housing (Drucker, 2013). Given that many people on probation and parole are expected to have a job and stable housing, it comes as no surprise that so many people fail to meet the terms of their release and upwards of 2/3 of people released return to prison within five years (Drucker, 2013).

D. Invisible Consequences

Perhaps the most concerning health effect that mass incarceration has is not the way it can serve to debilitate an individual but on the impact it has on communities collectively. Drucker states boldly that, "though innocent of any crime, the children of prisoners are also punished by the far reaching effects of our system of mass incarceration just as surely as if they themselves had been convicted" (Drucker, 2013). Mass incarceration robs children of a parent, a

role model, a provider, a source of discipline, a sense of family and community. As a result, the children of people who have been incarcerated are six times more likely to be incarcerated themselves (Freudenberg, 2001). These children, like their parents, are also substantially more likely to struggle with drug addiction and mental health challenges (Freudenberg, 2001). For the children of incarcerated parents growing up in neighborhoods with poor education systems, few economic opportunities, and a multibillion dollar industry systematically looking to increase opportunities for profit, the theory of Lumpen Abuse captures their experiences aptly (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009).

The model offered by Bourgois and Schonberg remains the strongest framework with which one can analyze incarceration because of its emphasis on the value of qualitative observation. Quantitative values can measure rates that suggest bias or demonstrate the effects of economic policy. However, bias and policy motivation cannot be quantified. In an era where policies and decisions are no longer explicitly biased in their language, it is nearly impossible to use quantitative methods to measure implicit or unconscious bias and racism (Drucker, 2013). A theory of Lumpen Abuse analyzes the large scale societal forces in action while acknowledging that symbolic violence serves to make the biases in these policies seem like the natural order of things (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009). There is no statistical test to measure degree of symbolic violence. In order to understand how the incarceration of pregnant women has been constructed as a normal judicial process and not an institutional failing, a theory of Lumpen Abuse is key to unearthing the symbolic violence at the heart of judicial problem. With a theory of Lumpen Abuse in mind, the conversations that took place in class about identity, motherhood, and autonomy take on new salience.

This conflict between competing identities, mother versus convict, particularly for women who are not only mothers to children on the outside but who are also currently pregnant is one that dominated class discussions quite frequently. For many women, this time while they were pregnant was the largest amount of time they would be able to spend with their children for the foreseeable future. Particularly for the mothers who were relatively far along in their pregnancies, the prospect of mothering while incarcerated was becoming more and more problematic. This struggle was consistently marked by two dominant ways of discussing their collective experiences. The first narrative was one that was marked by the more common, wider cultural belief about the quintessential bad mother. For Lauren, who had a six year old daughter at home, this struggle was articulated particularly clearly when she heard from her own mother about an interaction that had happened at her daughter's Parents Visiting Day at school.

Lauren's daughter's parents visiting day at school was distinctly marked by her mother's absence. While her grandmother had stepped in to fill the role, other children in her daughter's grade asked why her mother was absent. Lauren's daughter rather matter of factly reported that, "my mom is a convict". When Lauren heard about this incident, it struck a deep and painful nerve. To hear that her own daughter referred to her mother as a "convict" cemented the notion that her most salient and important identity for those on the outside was that of someone who had been convicted of a crime. When sharing this story, Lauren discussed how deeply embarrassing this was for her: "It is so embarrassing, it really is; I'm ashamed when she says my mom is a convict." Not only did she feel guilty that she could not be there for Parent Visiting Day, but to know that this was how her daughter represented her to her classmates marked the fact that, for

Lauren's daughter she would grow up and experience some of her most formative years conceiving of Lauren as a convict first and a mother second.

These feelings of deep embarrassment and guilt were not unique to Lauren's experience of motherhood in prison. Lauren's story ushered in a discussion about the very mixed set of feelings regarding the ratio of guilt: embarrassment: anger: injustice for this group of incarcerated pregnant mothers. The guilt and the embarrassment are, to a certain extent, rather obvious. Having imbibed the American narrative that crime is committed by individuals knowingly and with malicious intentions, many women would acknowledge that they had done something wrong and were perhaps deserving of punishment. However, as the realities of pregnancy became more and more salient, the sense of indignation about their treatment as prisoners mounted. Even if one takes the most simplistic understanding of the justice system in which one "does the time if they do the crime," it is challenging to understand how concepts of justice and punishment apply to the human being these women were growing, learning about, and beginning to love. A frequent refrain of class became, "I get that we did stuff outside, but our babies are innocent".

The first time I heard this idea expressed was during a discussion about how the women were treated by the officers. Consistently the women sought to make their status as pregnant women their most salient identities, not only in an attempt to reject the shame that comes with the label of "convict" or "felon," but also to assert that the humans they were caring for were "innocent" and deserved to be treated as such. This concept of innocence was repeated again and again during class discussion. There were certainly women who in the process of appeals cases or who felt that they had been unjustly convicted for some particular reason. However, whenever

innocence was discussed in the context of motherhood, a dichotomy was always created between their own guilt as individuals and their innocence as pregnant women. Imagine for a moment being 36 weeks pregnant. The human inside of you, wiggles and squirms, hears and recognizes your voice, has observable sleep cycles. This sentient being while largely a distinct human being is still decidedly a part of its mother.

For the women at Helms grappling with concepts of innocence and guilt were made dramatically more challenging by the fact that a very real and significant part of each of their bodies was truly and unequivocally innocent. For these women, every perceived injustice that they experienced, be it a negative interaction with an officer or the hazards of a prison diet, represented a dual affront because it punished a part of their being that was objectively innocent. This created a double burden of negative emotion for women who on one hand felt intense guilt at having committed some type of action that had subjected their children both born and unborn to this lifestyle but also an intense anger and frustration because their children were being punished right along side of them.

A full discussion of innocence and guilt as understood by pregnant women in prison is far beyond the current scope of this paper. However, the women at Helms have raised fundamental questions about what it means to incarcerate a woman who is growing another human being that has never committed a crime. Their experiences raise questions about the morality of a legal system that only allows two hours of breastfeeding before a mother and newborn are separated despite the plethora of research that has proven breastfeeding is essential for a baby's long term health. The idea of prisons as "punitive parents" is one that has been well documented in feminist-criminology scholarship (Miller, 1998). This term was coined to underscore the idea

that incarceration actively corrodes an individual's ability to understand themselves as adults and to improve parenting skills. If there is one predominant take away message from what I heard throughout our classes, it was that prison as an organization actively undermines a woman's ability to be and perceive of herself as a good mother. The active corrosion of the image of herself as a good mother occurs simultaneously with a deep and unyielding desire to protect and love her children.

It is easy to get swept up in the media narratives that exist about the type of human a mother who is convicted of a crime might be. At first, the idea of a woman who does drugs while responsible for a young child or a mother who commits petty theft while knowing she is supposed to care for a child may strike someone as an embodiment of the quintessential bad mom. The sociocultural environment that leads to crimes of survival and drug addiction have been well established but are beyond the scope of this paper, and are quite frankly irrelevant to the present purpose. Hopefully, if one has gleaned anything from this paper it is that regardless of why a mother is incarcerated, it is almost never the case that she does not wish to be the best parent that she can possibly be. Being incarcerated should not be synonymous with bad parenting. Unfortunately, the current legal and institutional climate of incarceration creates a series of conditions that makes it nearly impossible for a woman to be the type of mother she wishes she could be. One must ask what does more damage to a family (and subsequently society): crimes of survival or the degradation of motherhood caused by the American criminal justice system.

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