Stuck Between Prison and a Hard Place: A Network Approach to Women's Re-entry

Experiences Following Incarceration

Dissertation

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Abstract

Returning to the community after incarceration is characterized by many barriers
that make reentry more difficult. With scant programing and resources available to
women leaving prison, research routinely finds previously incarcerated women rely
heavily on family and friends to help them get back on their feet. Of note, research has
yet to examine how the nuances of social connections impact if and how women leverage
social support. This dissertation explores how the varied facets of women's social
relationships impact reentry through 20 in-depth interviews focusing on three key factors:
type of relationship, relationship complexity, and life stage. I first investigate which
social relationships provide the most social support to women and whom women are
most likely to seek support from across their formal and informal social networks.
Findings demonstrate women seldom have access to formal support, instead relying
almost entirely on their personal social networks. Moreover, women most commonly turn
to their parents, siblings, romantic partners, and friends for support. Next, I discuss the
role of tie-complexity. Prior work notes that many women have positive or negative ties,
in other words social network connections who are helpful or harmful to the women's
reentry success. Building on this, I find that women leaving prison have far more
complicated relationships than simply "positive" or "negative". Indeed, many women had
ties that were supportive of their reentry efforts in some capacity, but that made their

reentry more difficult in other respects. This "tie-complexity" adds a level of intricacy to women's ability to access needed social support during their reentry that has yet to be thoroughly explored. I demonstrate that tie-complexity is not only common in the support networks of women leaving prison, but that it restricts women's willingness and ability to request social support from members of their social network and reduces mental health. Notably, tie-complexity impacted Black women to a greater extent than White respondents. Last, I examine how women's stage in life (E.g., age, motherhood, maturity) impacts the type of support they need for reentry and who they rely on and have available to provide support. I find that women in early, mid, and later life have different goals and needs for their reentry experience. Further, women at different life stages rely on different types of social ties to get their support needs met. These findings contribute to our understanding of how intersectionality and relationship dynamics differentially impacts women's experiences of reentry. Disentangling women's needs after incarceration and their access to social support is crucial for advising policy and programming that seeks to improve the experiences of women reintegrating with their community.

Dedication

Dedicated to the Students of The Ohio State University

Acknowledgments

Without the numerous brave women who openly shared their stories of reentry, difficulties, and achievements, this study would not have been possible. Thank you to all the women who selflessly participated in this study with the goal of helping future women in their shoes. Every one of you was a great inspiration for me. I hoped I handled your stories with the care and consideration they deserve.

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Publications

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Fields of Study

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Defined as an intended or unintended side effect of involvement with the criminal justice system, collateral consequences continue and exacerbate criminal punishment long after time has been served, functioning to make community re-entry after incarceration extremely difficult (Kirk and Wakefield 2018). Most returning citizens are faced with housing insecurity (Harding et al. 2013; Herbert et al. 2015), financial hardship (Schwatrz-Soicher et al. 2011; Sugie 2012), limited employment opportunities and reduced wages (Lyons and Pettit 2011; Western 2002; Western and Pettit 2005), notable legal debt (Harris 2016; Harris, Evans, and Beckett 2010), restrictions on civil participation (Behrens, Uggen, and Manza 2003; Manza and Uggen 2006; Weaver et al. 2014), poor mental and physical health (Massoglia and Pridemore 2015; Sugie and Turney 2017; Widleman and Muller 2012), and strained or broken interpersonal relationships (Apel 2016; Turney 2015).

Collateral consequences primarily stem from two drivers; absence and stigma. By nature, incarceration removes people from society for a prolonged period, knifing incarcerated persons off from the outside world. Termed "prisonization", prisoners become acclimated to the institutional rules, restrictions, culture, and isolation of incarceration (Clemmer 1940). The experience of prisonization can make transition back into society shocking (Martin 2018; Mckendy and Ricciarlelli 2021; Western et al. 2015).

Indeed, many returning citizens experience difficulty with overstimulation, decision paralysis, and dated technological understanding when faced with the rapid pace of society after incarceration (Martin 2018; Western 2018). Furthermore, the patterns of behavior necessary for prison survival, such as tendency towards violence, protectiveness of personal space, and gruff demeanor conflict with social norms on the outside (Caputo-Lavine 2015; Martin 2018). In sum, prisonization compounds the many burdens already experienced by those leaving prison through culture shock, sensory overload, and differing behavioral scripts, which make coping with reentry more difficult (Martin 2018; Mckendy and Ricciarlelli 2021).

Removal from society also impacts incarcerated persons through their absence itself. Indeed, even short removals from the community can upset someone's life, as brief spans of incarceration are linked to loss of housing, employment, education, and family hardship (Harding et al. 2013; Harding et al. 2018; Massoglia, Firebaugh, and Warner 2013; Stewart and Uggen 2020; Widleman and Wakefield 2013). Regarding employment, absence from the labor force while incarcerated can result in job loss and makes finding employment difficult on reentry (Harding et al. 2018; Ramakers et al. 2014; Western 2018), even after brief periods of incarceration (Kling 2006). Further, if employment is attained post incarceration, it is often for lower pay than what was earned prior to incarceration and has less opportunity for upward mobility (Sugie 2018; Lyons and Pettit 2011; Western 2002). For younger adults, incarceration can also disrupt schooling as it is difficult to return to or begin schooling with a felony record (Stewart and Uggen, 2020; Cardona and Loyd 2023; Miller et al. 2014). Last, being separated

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from family can not only cause social bonds to attenuate, but may also lead to increased household economic insecurity, housing inconsistencies, and children exhibiting more anti-social behavior, resulting in residential instability, and returning to struggling households after their incarceration (Sykes 1958; Widleman and Wakefield 2013).

Beyond the impacts stemming directly from removal from society, the mark of a criminal record functions as a salient social stigma that can impact access to housing, employment, and education (Kirk and Wakefield 2018; Pager 2003; Pager and Quillian 2005; Stewart and Uggen 2020). According to Goffman (1963), a criminal record serves as a master status upon which people make character judgements, operating to discredit a person of their redeeming qualities. Goffman further explains stigma functions to reduce life-chances through biases associated with holding a criminal record, as the master status of criminality brands those with justice involvement as sub-human. In a contemporary application, Wakefield and Uggen (2010) add that in addition to justice-involvement signaling dishonor and limiting life-chances, the negative status is compounded for people with intersecting disadvantages such as the gender dynamics, heightened poverty, worse mental health, and drug use found among incarcerated women, making women more vulnerable to collateral consequences than men (Bloom et al. 2005; Owen et al. 2017). Taken together, the removal from society and the barriers created by stigma women face during reentry create long-lasting consequences that impact women with felony convictions long after their incarceration.

Gendered Re-entry Experiences

Historically, most prisons in the United States have been institutions for men, prompting scholars and policymakers to focus their efforts on the male prison population. Though a smaller proportion of the carceral population, the female prison population is still substantial. From 1980 to 2008, the number of incarcerated women increased by six-fold-a notably sharper increase than the male prison population (Kruttschnitt 2010). With incarceration rates reaching an all-time high in 2009, the prison population peaked with 113,524 women behind bars at this time (Guernio et al. 2011). Since then, the rate of incarceration has fallen similarly for women and men, with women now accounting for 6.7% of the state and federal prison population (Carson 2021). Though a smaller proportion of the prison population, tens of thousands of women are still subjected to incarceration at a given time (Carson 2021). Further, these point-in-time values under-estimate the number of women who experience incarceration each year, as many were released prior to the year-end data collection (Pfaff 2017). These trends are similarly reflected in Ohio. While in the past 20 years the proportion of women incarcerated in Ohio has risen 33%, the number of women currently incarcerated and those comprising new admissions has been in decline, similar to men (ODRC 2022).

Despite the notable volume of women remaining behind bars, research on collateral consequences and re-entry primarily focuses on the experience of men (Carson 2021; Wakefield and Uggen 2010; Wildeman and Muller 2012). Of concern, the type and intensity of collateral consequences vary across different social groups (Wakefield and

Uggen 2010; Wildeman and Muller 2012). Thus, neglecting to focus on women's experiences is a notable deficit in the literature.

Compared to men, justice-involved women are faced with additional barriers before, during, and after incarceration. With exposure to multiple intersections of disadvantage and traumatic life events before incarceration, women frequently enter prison with acute and often chronic mental health problems (Messina and Grella 2006; Owen et al. 2017; Wolff et al. 2010). Having much higher exposure to trauma and abuse relative to women in the general population (Bloom et al. 2005; McDaniels-Wilson and Belknap 2008; Salisbury and Van Voorhis 2009), it is no surprise that incarcerated women struggle with drug abuse (Bloom et al. 2005; Plugge et al. 2008), mental health issues (Feldlock 2017; James and Glaze 2006), self-harm (Howard et al. 2017), and problematic interpersonal relationships (Greer 2000; Trammel 2009). The type of sentences women receive further reflect their greater disadvantage and trauma histories, with women being incarcerated primarily for drug and property offences (Carson 2021). Moreover, when women do engage in violent offences, often it is in reaction to an abuser or the need to protect their children (Thuma 2019).

Beyond situational characteristics, prison itself adversely affects women's circumstances. The environment of many women's prisons are considered more oppressive than men's facilities, with stricter rule enforcement (Douglas et al. 2009; Fellner 2006; Goomany and Dickinson 2015), more frequent negative staff interactions (Beck, Rantala, and Rexroat 2014), inadequate nutrition (Brisman 2008), and less vocational and recreational programming (Collica 2010; Mackenzie et al. 1989; Shover

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1991). Moreover, prisons isolate incarcerated people from their outside social connections (Sykes 1958). Placing greater value on interpersonal relationships and family bonds than men, women experience greater distress from this isolation, particularly the separation from their children (Christian 2005; Dodge and Pogrebin 2001; Houck and Looper 2002; Jiang and Winfree 2006). Supporting this, Crew, and colleagues (2017) examined differences between male and female experiences of the pains of imprisonment, noting that incarcerated women have less autonomy, worse psychological wellbeing, less trust in others, and a greater fear of their social networks eroding while in prison. The tumultuous backgrounds of incarcerated women combined with the alienating and resource deprived women's prison environment indicates that circumstances faced by incarcerated women while in prison are worse than faced by incarcerated men (Bloom et al. 2005; Lindquist and Lindquist 1997; Owen et al. 2017).

Once released from prison, women's past disadvantage and trauma, combined with their prison experiences, makes re-entry particularly difficult (Scroggins and Malley 2010). While work on women's re-entry experiences is limited, more broadly collateral consequences stemming from incarceration and other justice involvement are routinely found to negatively impact family dynamics, housing, employment, education, health, and overall life chances (Kirk and Wakefield 2018; Wakefield and Uggen 2010). Notably, these consequences are disproportionately felt by those already experiencing intersecting forms of disadvantage, making women particularly vulnerable (Wakefield and Uggen 2010). In the event of motherhood, a status held by between 60-80% of incarcerated women (Arditti and Few 2006; Belknap 2007; Glaze and Maruschak 2008;

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Kruttschnitt 2010), women re-entering the community not only have to navigate the same barriers as men from a place of heightened disadvantage; they often have to do so while also caring for children or trying to regain custody (Enos, 2001; Kruttschnitt 2010). Further disrupting a smooth re-entry, women are surveilled more closely during parole, increasing the chances they recidivate due to minor technical violations (Huebener and Pleggenkuhle 2015). Related, women also have more parole requirements to fulfil than men (McKendy and Ricciardelli 2021). In all, with women leaving prison being subjected to far more adversity than men, additional attention is needed to examine their experience of re-entry.

Despite women being predisposed to undergo more difficult re-entry experiences, there is less available programing for women leaving prison, especially programming tailored to women's needs, as well as fewer transitional living facilities and rehabilitative resources available to women during reentry (Scroggins and Malley 2010). Indeed, Duwe and Clark (2017) found that men were more commonly employed post-incarceration, attributing this to greater in-prison programming opportunities relative to those available in women's facilities. With less re-entry programs in place to aid in their re-entry, women face greater barriers to seeking employment and often few resources to address drug addiction, physical abuse, mental health challenges, transportation, safe and secure housing, and address additional financial difficulties, leaving them uniquely disadvantaged in terms of access to resources needed for a successful re-entry (Bloom et al. 2005; Bohmert 2016; Scroggins and Malley 2010; Willging et al. 2016). In all, it is not

surprising women have higher recidivism rates, with 2/3rds or women returning to prison within 5 years of release (Durose, Cooper, and Snyder 2014; Durose and Cooper 2023).

Social Networks and Re-entry

Referring to the provision of psychological and material resources that can buffer stress and hardship, social support is a key mechanism through which social connections can pave the way for a smoother re-entry experience. Four forms of social support are viewed to uniquely benefit the recipient; emotional, instrumental, appraisal, and informational support (Berkman et al. 2000; Cohen et al. 2004; House et al. 1985). Emotional support provides a caring and empathetic ear to ease the emotional burden of difficult and stressful situations. Instrumental support encapsulates all material needs, such as financial, transportation, or housing assistance. Appraisal support comprises the provision of advice and feedback to aid in navigating various aspects of life. Last, informational support serves to impart knowledge and connections to resources which can be leveraged to improve personal circumstances. In the case of re-entry, this may include teaching someone how to apply for jobs or referring them to a treatment program. Logically, larger social networks make social support more readily available and accessible (Berkman et al. 2000). In terms of reentry, greater social support networks allow those leaving prison to 1) more easily process the shock and difficulties of community re-entry, 2) receive greater economic assistance and stability, 3) make more informed and rational life decisions, and 4) be more aware of the opportunities and resources available to them.

Importantly, providing substantial social support to women transitioning home is difficult, as it takes a financial and emotional toll on those that provide it (Willging et al. 2016). Thus, most social support tailored to women's reentry needs is supplied by close relations, whereas loose ties are unlikely to provide substantial social support (Goodson-Miller 2022). Rather, distant relations primarily improve women's life chances after prison through connecting women with prosocial opportunities (E.g., social capital) (Goodson-Miller 2022). Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." Thus, social capital operates to provide opportunities by acquaintances validating someone as a worthy connection and sharing this positive valuation with others. Importantly, social capital allows for accomplishments that would not otherwise be possible (Coleman 1988). Like social support, more social connections offer a greater quantity and variety of resources that can be garnered through social capital (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988). Indeed, social capital can be leveraged during reentry for first-hand assistance and referrals to programing and employment opportunities (Baldry et al. 2006; Mallik-kane and Visher 2008; Rucks-Ahidiana et al. 2020; Western an Sirois 2019). Thus, in the event women do not receive substantial social support from a network tie, loose ties can still benefit women's reentry by increasing their social capital. In short, both social support and social capital confer additional benefits in the form of economic and informational resources, emotional support, advice, and referrals that can reduce the magnitude of consequences experienced due to incarceration.

Women's Social Networks

With less in-prison and reentry programing available to women, social connections remain one of the few resources and sources of social capital women can pull from to aid in their reentry (Huebner and Pleggenkuhle 2015; Scroggins and Malley 2010). However, relying heavily on social networks can also place women in a particularly vulnerable position. Although limited in scope, prior research suggests the social networks of previously incarcerated women often do not have the resources necessary to provide the various forms of social support women need for successful reentry (Willging et al. 2016). Further, after spending months if not years incarcerated, social bonds with non-incarcerated friends and family often erode, leaving returning women with few stable and supportive relationships remaining on the outside world (Coughenour 1995; Crewe, Hulley, and Wright 2017; Kreager and Kruttschnitt 2018). Compounding this, what relationships women did maintain may have high amounts of relational conflict, which could negatively impact their reentry (Falkin and Strauss 2003; Leverentz 2006; Wilgning et al. 2016). Taken together, while their social network may be one of the only resources women can leverage to support their reentry, many women may have limitations to the type and quantity of social support they can access from their personal networks. Research is needed to assess if and where social support falls short and what voids additional programming is needed to fill.

Though social networks are considered central for women's reentry success, limited work has examined how social network composition impacts women's access to social support during reentry (Goodson 2018; Reisig et al. 2002; Valera et al. 2015). This

omission is particularly concerning, as women are in a unique position of disadvantage on re-entry and rely more heavily on social support than men during their transition from prison (Cobbina 2010; La Vigne et al. 2009; Shollenberger 2009). To advance current research, I delve into three under-discussed elements of women's social support networks during their reentry. First, I examine who women leaving prison commonly turn to for various types of social support and what factors remove social ties from women's support networks. Second, I investigate how relationship conflict and social stigma within women's social support network impacts their ability or willingness to receive social support and their subsequent reentry experience. Last, I consider how reentry needs and social support access vary across women in early, middle, and later-life stages.

Data and Methods

The data used in this study consists of 20 semi-structured qualitative interviews with previously incarcerated women conducted between winter 2022 and spring 2023. Given the research focus on women recently released from prison, the sample includes women who were released from an Ohio prison within three years of their interview after having been incarcerated for at least one year. Convenience and snowball sampling of reentry programs and Facebook support groups for incarcerated women were used to recruit respondents. Of women interested in participating, respondents were selected based on life-stage and race to gain variability in women's reentry experiences. Given that Black women are more than twice as likely to be incarcerated than white women (The Sentencing Project 2015), care was taken to oversample Black women. The final

racial breakdown of the sample consisted of 11 Black women, 8 White women, and one Latina woman.

To capture the role of the life course in reentry experience, care was taken to sample women in different life stages; Early-life, middle-life, and later-life. As a result of including a larger share of older women, this sample also over-represents women holding life sentences (Pfaff 2017). Though I had originally planned to sample women in different life stages by age category, it quickly became apparent that age proved to be an incomplete metric of life stage, with some women identifying in different life stages as others of a similar age. Thus, I had to use qualitative indicators (discussed in Chapter 4) to determine life stage, making it difficult to recruit an equal number of women to each life-stage category. Further, multiple women were transitioning between life stages, making categorization less clear. This overlap in life-stage will be unpacked further in Chapter 4.

Interviews. Interviews were conducted by me over Zoom to accommodate the busy schedules of returning women, with interviews lasting 45 minutes to two hours. When conducting interviews, the subjectivity and characteristics of the interviewer can bias what the respondent discloses (England 1994). As a young White woman with no prior justice contact, I was concerned women in the sample would not feel comfortable sharing their complete stories, particularly given the sensitive nature of the questions. However, I found women from all ages and racial backgrounds were very forthcoming, suggesting my positionality did not inhibit their willingness to share. Further, in the case of interviewing Black women, I found my outsider status to be beneficial, as many felt it

was important to take the time to explain how Black American culture impacted their re-entry, assuming I had little exposure to Black American family dynamics and values. Likewise, many Black women perceived Black Americans as incredibly judgmental, which lent to Black women sharing more with me than they felt comfortable divulging to members of their own culture.

The interviews loosely followed a general interview guide (see Appendix A), but the interview naturally evolved based on each women's responses to broad interview questions and the additions they felt were integral to their story. All interviews covered criminal history, barriers to reentry, who women had in their social network, and what social support they accessed. Additional interview topics were often directed by their pathways to incarceration, life stage, faith, and racial background. Each participant received a $100 Amazon gift card in compensation for their time.

All respondents were read the IRB-Approved consent form and provided verbal consent before the interviews commenced. To protect their privacy, all women in the study were given pseudonyms based on top baby names for their time of birth in their racial category. To further protect the confidentiality of participants, other identifying information such as city of residence, city of arrest, charge, facility of incarceration, and exact time since release will not be disclosed.

Analysis. Interview transcriptions were done via a combination of Zoom audio transcription software and two researchers transcribing interviews by hand. In the event of audio issues or accents, both transcribers cross-referenced sections for accuracy. Within 24 hours of completing the interviews, comprehensive interview memos were

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created. Pulling from the interviews, interview memos, and interview transcriptions, a three-step process of data analysis was used to analyze data (Deterding and Waters 2021). This coding approach begins with gaining an overall thematic understanding of the data patterns. I did this by applying thematic codes to broad sections of text across all interviews, which permits cross-case comparison. Next, I identified the analytic codes most relevant to my research questions and further parsed out nuances within these themes. Last, I examined my coding validity and theoretical contributions by assessing cross-case consistency and systematically exploring outlier cases. These coding schemes were done through the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Blee (2009:148) provides the benchmark that robust qualitative data must meet the following criteria: "(1) all data are considered (2) spectacular/extraordinary events are not overly stressed (3) data that diverge from the pattern are not discounted without a clear rationale to do so." By leveraging this approach and considering the robustness of the data, I was able to present the most cohesive and clear summary of the respondent's stories. Data from each interview was used across all proceeding chapters leveraging the same analytical approach. The specific coding schemes for each chapter will be discussed in their relevant chapters.

Sample Characteristics. Notably, this sample has a high proportion of educated women, with only 20% of women having high school equivalency or less. Most participants had some college but had yet to complete a degree (45%) and 35% had a two or four-year degree. The above average level of education relative to national averages of incarcerated women may be a limitation of this study. For context, a large study of US

Table 1. Respondent Demographic and Background Information, n=20

	Mean (%)	Std. Dev.	Range
Age	35.50	3.32	20-73
Non-white	(60%)		
Education			
High school or less	(20%)		
Some college	(45%)		
Associates	(20%)		
BA/BS	(15%)		
Employment			
Employed full time	(30%)		
Self-Employed	(30%)		
Unemployed	(40%)		
In romantic relationship	(60%)		
Mothers	(65%)		
Trauma history			
Child abuse	(55%)		
Adult abuse by family	(15%)		
Adult abuse by partner	(55%)		
Partner abuse within 12 months of prison	(25%)		
Drug abuse history	(60%)		
Justice involved family	(25%)		
Previously incarcerated	(40%)		
Months incarcerated	78.55	23.08	12-396
Months since release	18.55	2.16	3-36
Charge			
Violent	(50%)		
Drug	(30%)		
Property	(10%)		
Other	(10%)		
Under parole supervision	(60%)		

state prisons found that though incarcerated women have a higher education level than men, 41% had not completed high school and 42% only had high school equivalency (Nowotny, Masters, and Boardman 2016). A notable factor is that this U.S. based sample consisted of currently incarcerated women, whereas most of my sample had been released for over a year, allowing them additional time to continue or begin their education as part of their reentry. Indeed, educational support is one of the most widely available reentry services for women (Scroggins and Malley 2010). Further, the majority of prisoners are serving sentences of a few years or less (Pfaff 2017), yet with a focus on recruiting women in older life stages, I oversampled women who had served longer sentences, giving them more time to complete in-prison educational opportunities than would be seen in a national sample.

Though women's household income was recorded, respondents often did not know the incomes of other members of their household, despite many depending on this income. Furthermore, all but three women made less than $49,000, with some reporting past year annual incomes despite not having a job at the time of the interview. Thus, a more accurate measure of economic independence is their employment status. While most women held full or nearly full time (>35 hours/week) jobs (60%), many of these women were self-employed (30%). The remaining 40% did not have formal employment. While most of these women were truly unemployed, two engaged in odd jobs for family members that provided some income.

Regarding their personal lives, 60% of women sampled were currently in a relationship. Many of these relationships began while incarcerated or were formed post-

incarceration, demonstrating the volatility of women's social relationships during incarceration (Coughenour 1995; Crewe et al. 2017). In line with past research, 65% of respondents were mothers[1] (Arditti and Few 2006; Belknap 2007; Glaze and Maruschak 2008; Kruttschnitt 2010). Eight of the mothers in the sample had adult children, while eight had at least one child under the age of 18. Of the women with children under 18 years of age, four had full custody of their children while four were trying to regain custody or had forfeit their parental rights.

Trauma history was captured by asking respondents if they ever experienced physical or sexual assault as a child (55%), as an adult from a family member (15%), as an adult from an intimate partner (55%), and as an adult from an intimate partner within 12 months of their incarceration (25%). While these proportions of past trauma are somewhat low relative to rates of victimization in past studies (McDaniels-Wilson and Belknap 2008; Messina and Grella 2006; Salisbury and Van Voorhis 2009; Wolff 2010), 85% of respondents experienced at least one of the trauma indicators. Related, 60% of the sample reported having a history of drug abuse, which is comparable to other studies on incarcerated women (Bloom et al. 2005; Covington and Bloom 2008; Mumola and Karberg 2006).

Turning to justice involvement, we see that only one in four women have close family members who were also justice involved, indicating that the majority of women did not learn criminal behavior from family members. When asking women what precipitated their most recent charge, 45% of women were convicted for crimes

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[1] Women who had both an adult and young child are counted in both groups.

committed by or related to male intimate partners, suggesting relationships with men was a common pathway resulting in women's justice involvement. Past research supports this trend, finding relationships with men often drive women's justice involvement by directly encouraging criminal participation or indirectly leading women to engage in crime and drug use through abuse (Agnew 2002; Jones 2008; Katz 2000; Pettiway 1987).

In the past, women have demonstrated high recidivism rates, with over two-thirds being rearrested within five years (Greenfeld and Snell 1999; Durose, Cooper, and Snyder 2014; Durose and Cooper 2023). Current estimates find 34% of women released from prison return to prison within 5 years (Durose and Cooper 2023). The current study has similar recidivism rates with 40% of respondents reporting being previously incarcerated at least once. However, only 20% of women had been repeatedly in and out of incarceration, relative to the national average of 38% of incarcerated women (Durose and Cooper 2023). One reason for this discrepancy is likely due to the ages of women sampled in the current study combined with having been released from prison the last three years. With Ohio no longer having female juvenile facilities, many of the younger respondents are not old enough to have served multiple terms in prison. Likewise, most of the later-life women were incarcerated for many decades, making recidivism less likely. This is supported by all eight women who were previously incarcerated falling into the middle-life category.

On average, women in the sample were incarcerated for 78.55 months (about 6.5 years) ranging from 1-33 years, with longer incarceration times skewed towards older respondents. Women had been released for 18.55 months on average at the time of the

interview, ranging from women released 3-36 months prior to the interview. Decades of literature demonstrates women commonly engage in poverty-based crimes such as property and drug crime (Carson 2021; Durose and Antenangeli 2023; Messerschmidt 1986). Contrary to this finding, this study has 50% violent offenders, 30% with drug convictions, and only 10% with property charges. Last, the other category (10%) is comprised of white-collar and smuggling charges. While there is a higher proportion of violent offences than typical, only the women's highest-level charge was noted in the descriptive statistics- most women who have a violent offence were engaging in drug or property offences simultaneously. For example, two participants received negligent manslaughter charges for giving drugs to someone who overdosed on them. Other violent offences occurred while selling or using drugs. Last, three women were charged with violent offences for acting in self-defense against a man or for a crime their boyfriends committed. This is in line with Thuma's (2019) historical work finding that women are more likely to be charged with violent crimes stemming from their own victimization and acts against abusers. Last, 60% of participants were still under parole supervision at the time of their interview.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter 2, I look closely at how women's social support networks are structured across formal and informal networks. Attention is given to identifying which types of informal relationships (parents, siblings, romantic partners, close friends, extended family, and loose ties) women commonly turn to for support and if the form

(instrumental, informational, emotional, and appraisal) and extent of social support provided is dependent on the type of relationship the support is pulled from. What factors influence if a social network tie remains in or leaves women's networks during incarceration is also explored. I find that women primarily rely on informal social support due to difficulty accessing formal support. Within their informal support network, women commonly turn to their mothers, sisters, close friends, and romantic partners for support during their reentry. Further, it becomes clear that the availability of different forms of social support (informational, financial, emotional, and instrumental) are dependent on the types of ties women have in their support network. Moreover, a clear division also becomes apparent in social support provision across close and loose ties; where close ties provide substantial social support, women only turn to loose ties to refer them to opportunities and resources. Last, I find that women's key social supporters are resistant to network erosion during incarceration, with the bulk of women's network loss while incarcerated stemming from loose ties being severed. Thus, past work overemphasizes the impact network attenuation during incarceration has on women's access to social support.

The third chapter will unpack the interaction between relational conflict and social support. Coining the term "tie-complexity" to capture the phenomena of a social tie who has both positive and negative impacts on women's reentry experience, I assess how women navigate the receipt or refusal of social support from members of their social network they hold tie-complexity with. I find substantial evidence of tie-complexity in women's social support networks, which limited the type and quantity of support women

requested or were provided. Moreover, having to request or receive support from a complex tie had detrimental effects on women's mental health. Tie-complexity commonly stemmed from trauma, abuse, volatile interactions, drug addiction, over-reliance, and discrimination against justice involvement. Of note, Black respondents had a far higher rate of tie-complexity in their support networks, with Black women citing respectability politics and the stigmatizing culture of Black American families as a key barrier in their reentry experience.

Chapter 4 incorporates the role of life stage in the re-entry process. Women in early, middle, and later-life stages are expected to have very different re-entry needs and goals. Further, the social network composition of a young women is likely different than that of women in later life stages. This chapter is devoted to exploring how women at different life-stages navigate their re-entry, construct their social networks, and leverage social support. Findings suggest that women in early life need additional supports regarding independent living, communication skills, and emotional intelligence. Women in this age group are often heavily reliant on their parents and sisters as their primary supports. Middle-life women reported the greatest difficulty over establishing their careers, getting an education, finding stable housing, and parenting. These women had the most diverse networks, often citing support from parents, siblings, friends, romantic partners, and other justice involved women. Later-life women often had greatly diminished social networks, due to long spans of incarceration, stigma, and outliving their support networks. Left with few people to turn to, women in this age group are often

most reliant on re-entry programing for all forms of social support, including housing and employment assistance.

The final chapter will synthesize my findings from the three substantive chapters and identify what gaps this research fills. I then discuss comprehensive policy solutions advised by the results of this study. I will conclude by acknowledging any limitations in the study design and suggest fruitful directions for future research.

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Chapter 2. Who Do You Turn To?

Leaving prison is a time of immense change and difficulty for returning citizens. Though returning to the free world is something all prisoners look forward to, transitioning from prison is accompanied by numerous barriers related to reintegration, including economic hardship, housing insecurity, unemployment, poor mental and physical health, culture shock, and relationship strain (Kirk and Wakefield 2018; Opsal and Foley 2013). Faced with worse mental health, greater housing and economic insecurity, shorter work histories, and drug dependence prior to incarceration (Arditti and Few 2006; Bloom, Owen, and Covington 2005; James and Glaze 2006; La Vigne 2009; Opsal and Foley 2013), women leaving prison are uniquely vulnerable to these reentry barriers and struggle to overcome them on their own (Cobbina 2010; Shollenberger 2009; Valera et al. 2015). Research focusing on reentry finds women have two sources of aid during this transition: formal and informal social support (Arditti and Few 2006; Cobbina 2010; Valera et al. 2015; Valera et al. 2017).[2]

Pertaining to formal supervision and programming, formal support is provided by parole officers, community organizations, licensed professionals, and care providers (Lu et al. 2020). Informal network supports refer to social support women can leverage from

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[2] Recall Berkman et al.'s (2000) summary of the four types of social support: Emotional, Informational, Appraisal, and Instrumental.

their personal relationships, such as family, romantic partners, and friends (Lu et al. 2020). Importantly, limited work suggests women are likely to receive different types of support through formal and informal support providers, with formal support typically producing more informational support and informal networks providing more instrumental, emotional, and appraisal support (Valera et al. 2015; Willing et al. 2016). Despite formal and informal social support being the primary outlet for women to uplift themselves during reentry, there is mixed evidence regarding the accessibility of social support via formal and informal support networks (Cobbina 2010; Goodson 2018; Huebner and Pleggenkuhle 2015; McKendy and Ricciardelli 2021; Willging et al. 2016). Furthermore, additional research is needed to unpack whether and how access to unique forms of support varies depending on the source of formal and informal support.

In this chapter, I leverage in-depth interviews with 20 respondents to investigate whether and from where women receive social support during community reentry following a period of incarceration. To shed light on these topics, I explore from whom women leaving prison receive social support, including formal reentry resources and their personal social networks. Specifically, I examine if women received different kinds of support from different types of social ties (E.g., parole officer, reentry programs, parents, siblings, extended family, romantic partner, close friends, or loose ties) and identify where women report needing additional social support beyond those provided through reentry resources and personal social networks. Further, I assess whether women received the amount of support expected, and if not, why they felt some of their expectations for support were not met. Last, I explore how network attenuation during incarceration

impacts women's social support networks. Overall, findings reveal that women are most

dependent on informal network support due to their difficulty acquiring formal support.

Furthermore, different relationships within women's informal networks typically provide

alternate forms and volume of support. Last, women experience substantial network

shrinkage during their incarceration, but this erosion is primarily limited to women's

loose ties, or distant connections, as opposed to close relations. Therefore, women's

access to integral social support experiences minimal impact from incarceration, yet their

access to diverse contacts and networking opportunities (social capital) has diminished.

Background

   Formal Support: Parole and Programming. Designed to aid reintegration into

society and prevent recidivism, parole theoretically should function to provide formal

social support to women during their reentry (Petersilia 1999). Indeed, prior studies

indicate some women find their supervising officers to be key social supports,

particularly regarding informational support (Arditti and Few 2006; Cobbina 2010; La

Vigne 2009). Likewise, women who perceive a good relationship with their probation

officer and view them as sympathetic were less prone to recidivism (Mueller, Noh, and

Carey 2021). However, women often cite parole as detrimental to their reentry (Cobbina

2010; Durnescu 2011; McKendy and Ricciardelli 2021). Contrary to providing support,

community supervision can inhibit autonomy, disrupt routines, deprive women of private

relationships and intimacy, consume time, drain finances, and socially stigmatize

(Durnescu 2011; McKendy and Ricciardelli 2021). Moreover, the threat of

reincarceration looms large in the minds of those under community supervision, making

women feel precarious and at risk of parole violations during their interactions with

community supervisors, increasing their stress (Durnescu 2011). In all, though women

experience a spectrum of social support availability from their parole officer, little is

known regarding what factors contribute to women's ability and willingness to leverage

social support from their parole officer.

The second common form of formal social support available to women during

reentry are treatment and reentry programs. Community and government support

programs meet a variety of needs, including the provision of mental health counseling,

addiction management, housing, employment, childcare, life skills, and general resources

directed at easing women's transition back to society (La Vigne 2009; Scroggins and

Malley 2010). Post-release services are immensely helpful in the provision of social

support when available and easily accessed (Cobbina 2010; Valera et al. 2017). Notably,

not all services are equally available, with most emphasizing employment, life skills, and

education training rather than providing counseling, healthcare, and parenting services

(La Vigne 2009; Scroggins and Malley 2010). Further, there are typically fewer programs

available once women are released back to their community relative to what they

received during incarceration (Slaght 1999).

Importantly, to reap the benefit of these services, women must be aware of their

existence. Though being connected with programming and service providers can smooth

reentry, returning citizens typically report that pre-release planning is insufficient to build

connections with community providers, which can limit their use (Slaght 1999; Valera et

al. 2017; Willing et al. 2016). Likewise, many women lack the of knowledge of programs available to them, particularly those with small social networks, scant social capital, and cumulative disadvantage (Bohmert and Demaris 2018; Reisig, Holtfreter and Morash 2002; Willging et al. 2016). Taken together, while social services and reentry programming are key supports for some women, many women are unable to access them and receive their benefits due to lack of social capital and/or knowledge connecting them to programs.

Considering both forms of formal social support, prior research presents mixed evidence of their availability to women leaving prison. Studies range substantially in their estimates of women's reliance on formal social support (Cobbina 2010; Slaght 1999), with some citing as little as 2% of women's social support stem from their parole officer, reentry programs, social services, or treatment facilities (Goodson 2018). Further, women often must leverage their *personal* networks to meet parole expectations and access community resources (Bohmert and Demaris 2018; Slaght 1999; Valera et al. 2017; Willing et al. 2016). Thus, while some women receive substantial benefits from formal social support, we lack clarity on why so many do not. Additional research is needed to identify the factors that limit women's understanding of services available to them, what barriers women experience when attempting to utilize formal social support, and how personal networks impact this access and utilization. This study pulls from women's detailed accounts of their experiences with formal social support to illuminate answers to these questions.

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Informal Support. When leaving prison, informal social networks are an integral form of support for returning citizens. Indeed, those who have access to social support through their personal networks typically have better reentry experiences (Shollenberger 2009) and incarcerated women report believing that their reentry plans are dependent on supportive networks (Cobbina 2010). For women, informal social support is the most critical aspect of their reentry (Cobbina 2010; Valera et al. 2015; Valera et al. 2017) and more readily accessed than sources of formal support (Goodson et al. 2018; Valera et al. 2017). During reentry, women commonly depend on their personal social networks for assistance with housing, employment, finances, childcare, informational resources, life skills, transportation, and emotional well-being (Bohmert and DeMaris 2018; Goodson 2018; Morash 2010; O'Brien and Harm 2002; Valera 2015). While women are highly reliant on their personal social networks during reentry, less is known about how different types of relationships influence the extent and form of social support offered.

Studies examining the providers of informal social support during reentry often use ambiguous terms such as "family", "friends", or "intimate others" when describing network members, which could include nuclear, extended, or fictive family (Cobbina 2010; La Vigne et al. 2005; Leverentz 2006a; Salisbury and Van Voorhis 2009; Valera et al. 2015). Further, this approach does not differentiate between familial roles, which is concerning as bonds with children and romantic partners are less likely to survive incarceration relative to bonds with parents and siblings (La Vigne et al. 2005). Further, members of one's extended family are less likely to provide social support than nuclear family members (Goodson 2018). Likewise, by using the general category of "friends",

the nuanced differences in types of social support provided by justice-involved women and community-based friends are obscured. Indeed, in-prison research suggests friendships with other incarcerated women are more adept at providing emotional, informational, and instrumental support than outside friends, given their shared experience of incarceration (Clone and DeHart 2014; Collica 2010; Forsyth and Evans 2003; Giallombardo 1966; Hart 1995; Severance 2005). Likewise, this general category of "friends" also conflates close friends with distant friends, despite depth of friendship playing a key role in the type and extent of support or social capital provided (Goodson-Miller 2022).

In the first study to explore women's informal social support networks on parole by network role, Goodson (2018) finds that different types of relationships (E.g., parent, romantic partner, sibling, friend, extended family) are more or less reliable for social support. Though Goodson distinguishes which forms of support women are most likely to receive from their aggregate support network during reentry, she does not examine whether the type of support provided varies by relationship category. Given different relationship ties likely bring access to distinct resources, skills, knowledge, emotional intelligence, and willingness to help, it stands to reason that the type of network tie will be closely correlated with the form and extent of support women receive from them. Supporting this, Reisig and colleagues (2002) find the extent of emotional and instrumental support provided to women on parole varies across parents, siblings, and friends. Next, I theoretically break out how specific tie types are expected to relate to the extent and type of social support available to women during their community reentry.

Family Support. Family social connections are perhaps the most central providers of social support for returning citizens. One reason for this is that family members are most likely to meet the most immediate needs of those leaving prison-- needs revolving around housing and financial assistance (Dodge and Pogrebin 2001; Schram et al. 2006; Shinkfield and Graffam 2009; Shollenberger 2009; Visher, Yahner, and La Vigne 2010). Further, women are more reliant on their families for support to meet these needs than men (Cobbina 2010; La Vigne 2009). In addition to housing and financial assistance, women typically receive emotional and instrumental support from their family (Cobbina et al 2010; Reisig et al. 2002; Valera et al. 2015; Willging et al. 2016), with female family members and older relatives being most likely to provide this support (Cobbina 2010; Shollenberger 2009; Valera et al. 2015; Western et al. 2015). Less research has examined the provision of appraisal support[3], (Goodson 2018; Willging et al. 2016) and research on informational support finds that family members are often ill-prepared to provide this type of support (Willgnin et al. 2016). To gain a better grasp of how support varies across specific family roles, I move forward by discussing prior research that has focused on how support may vary across parents, siblings, children, and extended family.

Parents. Comprising just under half of network ties that women typically nominate as most helpful, parents (Primarily mothers) are by far the most common network members women turn to for social support (Clone and DeHart 2014; Goodson 2018; Shollenberger 2009). Parents are particularly central for instrumental support, with many women depending on them for housing, financial aid, food, childcare, care

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[3] Advice and feedback on decision making and communication.

packages, and transportation (Goodson 2018; Reisig et al. 2002; Shollenberger 2009;

Valera et al. 2015). Whether parents are a resource for emotional support is under

contention. Although Goodson (2018) finds that mothers were rated the most supportive

of their daughters during reentry, and that emotional support was the most common form

of support women received, Goodson does not specifically indicate whether this

emotional support typically came from mothers. Other research identifies parents as a key

emotional support, but not to the same extent as emotional supported provided by

women's siblings (Clone and DeHart 2014). In contrast, Reisig et al. (2002) suggest

women are not as likely to turn to their parents for emotional support during reentry

relative to other tie types. In addition to this mixed evidence regarding emotional support

provided by parents, research has yet to assess the degree to which parents provide

informational and appraisal support. In all, while I expect parents to be identified as

substantial sources of instrumental support, the extent to which parents also provide

emotional, informational, and appraisal support is unclear. Further, research has yet to

explore why some women perceive their parents as a source of emotional support while

other women do not.

Siblings. The next most helpful form of biological family are siblings (Clone and

DeHart 2014; Goodson 2018; Reisig et al. 2002). For justice-involved women, siblings

are considered the strongest providers of emotional support both in prison and during

reentry (Clone and DeHart 2014; Reisig et al. 2002; Valera et al. 2015). Siblings can also

be notable providers of instrumental support, meeting many of the same demands as

parents, though not to the same frequency (Clone and DeHart 2014; Goodson 2018;

Reisig et al. 2002). While siblings have been identified as providing a vital source of emotional support, we have yet to understand why women feel siblings are more approachable for emotional support relative to their parents. Further, research is unclear regarding sibling's role in providing sources of informational or appraisal support. Given that emotional support can be conflated with appraisal support (Berkman et al. 2000), it is possible women seek appraisal support from siblings to a greater extent as well.

  Children. Research investigating the role of children as a provider of social support is mixed. Some consider children a source of emotional support, finding quality time spent with children improves women's overall emotional wellbeing (Reisig et al. 2002; Valera et al. 2015). While perceiving that others value and care for them is protective of women's emotional well-being, having a confidant to process emotional difficulties that can't be shared with children may be more beneficial to women (Thoits 1995), suggesting the social support that young children provide is not as beneficial as support from more mature social ties. Further, past work does not differentiate how the child's age (adult or under 18) differentially impacts the support they provide their mothers, beyond adult children being more likely to provide support (La Vigne 2009). Notably, young children likely do not have the emotional intelligence or resources to provide support beyond their loving presence, whereas adult children may be able to provide various forms of support given their advanced life-stage. Chapter 4 further discusses the role of children as sources of social support by describing how women's life stage upon re-entry further shapes the availability of various forms of social support.

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Extended Family. Extended or "other family" members may serve as an additional category of social support. Again, studies are inconsistent regarding which family ties fall into this category, yet often this includes grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, and fictive family (Goodson 2018; Reisig et al. 2002; Shollenberger 2009). Non-nuclear family members also vary in the type of support they provide, with some studies finding female family members to be substantial sources of support, including grandmothers, aunts, and cousins (Shollenberger 2009; Valera et al. 2015). However, gender aside, some research suggests that non-nuclear family members provide less support than nuclear family members and that extended family ties are those that are most likely to be perceived negatively (Goodson 2018; Goodson-Miller 2022). Thus, while extant literature lauds "family" as central for support, it is unlikely that extended family plays as central a role in assisting women during their reentry relative to support provided by nuclear family. Importantly, though extended family members may not provide the same extent of support as immediate family, having larger support groups creates more social capital that can be used to gain life skills, information, employment, and housing (Reisig et al. 2002). Further, extended family members are more likely to be employed and prosocially networked relative to close family ties, which improves women's life chances and employment opportunities (Goodson-Miller 2022). Therefore, the support they do provide is important for key prosocial turning points in women's lives (Giordano et al. 2002). Thus, while extended family may not provide social support to the same extent as provided by immediate family, they likely still serve as an important resource during reentry that will be explored.

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Romantic Partners. Current and former romantic partners are an important source of social support during reentry, especially for men (Giordano et al. 2002; Laub and Sampson 1993; Valera et al. 2015). Though desistance literature considers marriage and cohabitation one of the primary routes to a conventional lifestyle for men (Giordano et al. 2002; Huebner and Pleggenkuhle 2015; Laub and Sampson 1993), research on women's reentry finds significant others play a far less important role than biological family in the provision of social support (Goodson 2018; La Vigne 2009; Valera et al. 2015) and are less protective of recidivism (Huebner, DeJong, and Cobbina 2010). Indeed, women's romantic relationships experience substantial attenuation when women enter the justice system. Even short periods of incarceration are related to an increased risk of divorce and a lower likelihood of cohabitating with the fathers of their children (Arditti and Few 2006). Women are also half as likely to live with a romantic partner after release relative to men (Huebner and Pleggenkuhle 2015). Further, many women intentionally avoid romantic relationships during their reentry due to the unpredictability and chaos associated with romantic partners (Leverentz 2006b). Thus, it is unsurprising that romantic partners make up the smallest portion of justice involved women's support network (Clone and DeHart 2014; Goodson-Miller 2022).

Among women who maintained their relationship through their incarceration or those who formed a new romantic relationship post-release, romantic partners likely serve as a primary social support. Often cohabitating with their partners if in a relationship, women commonly receive instrumental support in the form of financial assistance, housing, transportation, and childcare (Bohmert 2016; Valera et al. 2015;

Wright et al. 2013). Intimate partners are also common providers of emotional support (Valera et al. 2015; Wright et al. 2013). Relative to biological family, romantic partners are more likely to aid women in gaining financial independence, finding work, and adopting prosocial change (Shollenberger 2009; Wright et al. 2013). Moreover, by providing financial security, housing, and a prosocial environment, partners can function to stabilize women's lives during reentry (Wright et al. 2013). Importantly, by only focusing on current romantic partners, prior research may have overlooked sources of support provided by fathers of children (if fathers are no longer romantically involved) or past romantic partners (Valera et al. 2015; Goodson 2018). Overall, romantic partners may be very helpful and provide a source of support to women during reentry, yet not many women retain romantic partners in their networks following incarceration. Additional research is needed to assess how women differentially leverage social support from partners and family based on their current or prior relationship status.

Friends. Friendship is perhaps the most variable origin of social support across research. In Valera and colleague's (2015) study on justice-involved women's support networks, friendships were mentioned in passing and considered to be far less central to women's support networks than family. When friends were noted, they primarily provided emotional support, with occasional instances of supplying instrumental or informational support. Moreover, Goodson (2018) demonstrated that, next to extended family, friends were the least likely to provide support and the most likely to be considered unhelpful network ties. However, other studies find friends to be central to women's reentry success (Clone and Dehart 2014; La Vigne 2009; Parsons and Warner-

Robbins 2002; Valera et al. 2017). Indeed, friends may be more helpful than family in the provision of appraisal support and encouraging of prosocial change (Wright et al. 2013). Likewise, women are more likely to turn to their friends for emotional support than their family (Reisig et al. 2002). Many friends also function as prosocial role models, further encouraging women to desist (Parsons and Warner-Robbins 2002; Wright et al. 2013). Thus, evidence is mixed on the type and extent of support women can garner from their friends while transitioning from prison.

The variation in the impact of friendship likely stems from how friendship is defined across various studies (Goodson-Miller 2022). First, close and distant friends are often considered together, obscuring likely differences in social support provision by the closeness or attachment associated with the friendship (Goodson 2018; Valera et al. 2015). Indeed, close friends often provide the same extent of social support as family members (Clone and Dehart 2014; Goodson-Miller 2022; Reisig et al. 2002; La Vigne 2009) and in some instances are considered to be family members (Shollenberger 2009). Distant friends likely provide less social support overall but may serve as pivotal source of social capital that are more likely to connect women with needed resources (Goodson-Miller 2022). Thus, weaker friendships may be particularly important in providing informational resources. In sum, by collapsing the type of friendship tie (close versus distant friends), research may be underestimating the impact that certain types of friends have on women's reentry and ignoring key differences in access to a variety of social support types.

Another shortcoming of prior research is that studies focused on friendship support do not differentiate between non-justice-involved friends and those friendships that were formed during women's incarceration. This is an unfortunate limitation, as friends with different experiences are likely capable of providing different types of support. Within prison, research identifies friendships formed with other incarcerated women provide central forms of emotional, instrumental, and informational support (Clone and Dehart 2014; Collica 2010; Hart 1995; Severance 2005). Moreover, the deep, familial-like bonds that form among incarcerated women may make justice-involved women more likely to provide support similar to that provided by family members (Clone and DeHart 2014; Forsyth and Evans, 2003; Giallombardo 1966). Having been through the system themselves, justice-involved friends may also know more about resources available to women during reentry, making them valuable informational supports. Furthermore, women who have already completed a successful reentry can be salient role models and provide roadmaps to re-entry success (Parsons and Warner-Robbins 2002). Turning to non-justice-involved friends, prosocial friends can help women desist from crime (Parsons and Warner-Robbins 2002). Without the barriers linked with justice involvement (Kirk and Wakefield 2018; Opsal and Foley 2013), friends with no criminal history likely confer greater social capital, particularly when seeking employment (La Vigne 2009). Taken together, past work suggests friends may provide a greater variety of social support than family, though it is unclear how this varies by the closeness of the friendship relationship and friend's justice involvement.

Loose Ties. Beyond women's core support network, women often have additional network members who provide limited and transient social support. In her groundbreaking study of women's social support networks after prison, Goodson-Miller (2022) demonstrated that relationship closeness was strongly linked to the extent of social support the tie provided, with more distant connections providing less support. Though loose ties provided less day-to-day assistance, they served as salient sources of social capital to the women in Goodson-Miller's study, providing much needed prosocial network opportunities. Reisig and colleagues (2002) also support the idea that larger social networks, regardless of tie strength, confer greater life chances. Thus, though loose ties such as extended family, distant friends, or community relationships are not considered central to women's reentry support, they likely serve a pivotal function in women's reentry experience. Of concern, with less relationship rapport, these loose connections may be the most at risk of leaving women's social networks during incarceration (Goodson-Miller 2022). Thus, research is needed to assess the role these relationships play and if they whether incarceration long enough to remain accessible to women during reentry.

Current study

This chapter is designed to explore formerly incarcerated women's social support networks and identify how various types of relationships shape women's access to formal and informal social support. Analysis begins by discussing the types of support women received through formal supports, including support provided by parole officers and

reentry programming. I also consider whether women's expectations of formal support during incarceration were unmet once released and the reasons why certain types of expected support were not fulfilled by formal supports. Next, I explore how different forms and extent of support vary across the type of informal relationship (E.g., parent, sibling, extended family, intimate partner, close friend, loose ties). I close by examining the impacts of network attrition on access to social support during reentry.

Data and Methods[4]

 Parole and Reentry. During the demographic portion of the interview, women were asked if they were still under parole supervision. Those who responded "yes" were asked how being on parole impacted their reentry (n=12). Notably, this study did not specifically ask women how their parole officer provided social support. Rather, most responses regarding parole officers were prompted by the question, "was there anyone you sought support from who did not give you the support you needed?"

 Programming. To ascertain what programming women utilized to support their reentry, respondents were asked if there "was any programming they received or wish they received that aided in their reentry." Respondents with a drug use history were also asked "Have you received support from addiction recovery services that you were unable to receive from your personal social network (partner, family, friends). If so, what did this look like for you?" However, most comments regarding programming arose when

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[4] Please refer to the Data and Methods section of Chapter 1 for information on data collection, recruitment, and sample characteristics.

asking women "since your release, who are the top three people you used as social supports?" and "was there anyone you sought support from who did not give you the support you needed?"

Informal Support Network. Women's core informal support network was ascertained by asking "since your release, who are the top three people you used as social supports?" The type of ties in women's support networks were determined by asking women what role each nominated tie played in their life. Once this network was attained, I defined each of the four forms of social support to the respondent and asked her to identify and give examples of all types of support the nominated tie provided.

Loose Ties. Information on loose ties was gained by asking women if 1) "there anyone else who is important to your social network we have not yet discussed?" 2) What relationships challenged your reentry efforts? 3) Was there anyone you sought support from who did not give you the support you needed? 4) Was there anyone you thought would provide support, but you did not feel comfortable asking them for help? And 5) Has anyone in your social network made staying crime free and/or sober more difficult? Women also added honorable mentions when noting their top three supports and brought up loose ties in natural conversation.

Network Attrition. To avoid leading questions, there was no question that directly asked if women experienced network erosion while incarcerated. Rather, respondents were asked how their relationships changed or remained the same during their incarceration. Respondents readily volunteered information about their network

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attrition at this point, with the question "was there anyone you sought support from who did not give you the support you needed?" also eliciting stories of network attrition.

      Analytical Strategy. I began my exploration into women's social support networks by identifying sections of each interview that discussed formal and informal social support provision or lack thereof. Within the formal social support theme, I created codes for positive parole experiences, negative parole experiences, positive program experiences, and negative program experiences. The negative parole code was further unpacked into the reasons women felt parole negatively impacted their reentry. The positive program experience code was further broken out by type and extent of social support women received from different programs they participated in. Negative program experience codes were subsequently dissected into two trends: not receiving programming support due to insufficient programs and not receiving programming support due to lack of knowledge surrounding program options and resources.

      Women's informal networks were organized into "top three supports", "other supports", and "network erosion" themes. Within the top three support theme, women's discussions of the social support they received from their top three social supporters were broken down into the type of social support each relationship provided, which was cross-referenced with the role the social support held in the respondent's network. The "other supports" theme was further coded by the type of support network members outside of women's top three core support network provided, demonstrating the utility of loose ties in women's networks. Network attrition was assessed across the reason for the tie severing, resulting in codes for outdegree (severed by respondent) and indegree (severed

by tie) network erosion. Outdegree network attrition spawned the child codes

"relationship conflict", "avoidance of criminogenic peer" and "abandonment", whereas

indegree network attrition included sub-themes of stigma and relationship conflict. Both

indegree and outdegree attrition codes were cross-referenced with drug use history.

Results

Formal Support

Parole. Beginning with women's experiences with their parole officer (PO), a

theme that emerged in women's responses was that their PO regularly did not provide

assistance during reentry. While incarcerated, women were under the impression that the

parole officer's job would be to prevent them from recidivating by providing supervision,

but also by networking them with reentry programming and community resources,

helping them find employment, and directing them to felon-friendly housing. Once in the

community, all but one woman found their PO either presented more barriers for them to

overcome or was absent altogether. This is in line with past work that finds community

supervision mirrors the pains of incarceration (Durnescu 2011). Of note, women rarely

found their parole officers to be a positive support.

During their reentry, women often felt their parole was looming over their heads,

serving as a constant threat of reincarceration. Barriers women commonly noted were

parole expectations such as "stable"[5] employment and housing, high levels of

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[5] What was considered stable varied by parole officer, which lead to a notable disparity in what was
expected of women to meet expectations.

surveillance, and restrictions on personal networks. Women also noted that the legality of being on parole also limited their options, as some felon-friendly careers, housing options, and educational programs were restricted to those not on parole. One of the most common issues women noted were parole officers who were heavily involved in sanctioning their movements, including regular and unplanned home visits. Lori, a 57-year-old white woman who was incarcerated for 26 years, was an hour late to her interview because her parole officer showed up unexpectedly for a home visit. When asked if her having to reschedule due to her parole officer was common, Lori elaborated that parole officers "come when they come" and that though she receives a text the "morning" of the visit, the visit is often hours or days after the text scheduled, limiting her ability to make social or work obligations. Thus, in line with Durnessu (2011) I find that parole supervision functions as a unique pain of reentry.

Many women found their parole officers did not do their due diligence, which impacted their reentry in various ways. Some found their PO inaccurately recorded information, including their phone number, residence, and completed parole requirements. This inaccurate information increased women's risk of being incarcerated for parole violations and made some women repeat requirements already completed. Many felt they needed to protect themselves from the lack of oversight, as they heard insufficient records played a part in their peers returning to prison on parole violations. Minimal interaction with PO's was common, resulting in women feeling they did not receive the support they had hoped their PO would provide for their reentry. The following conversation with Amy, a 45-year-old white woman, illustrates this experience.

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Interviewer: Was there anyone that you turned to for support who did not give

you support when you asked?

Amy: Not really… That's a lie. My parole officer. My parole officer gave me

zero support. When I was looking for independent housing. I called like asking

like, 'hey? Like, could you give me like some direction to go… like I'm getting

turned down before I get the opportunity to even have a conversation with

somebody', and her exact words were, "good luck". I never saw their faces, not

one time. They never once drug tested me. They never once did a home visit.

They never…. like I could have been in New Mexico selling drugs or doing who

knows? Like I could have been anywhere in the world doing anything, and they

never would have known because I never once saw their faces.

Amy concluded her thoughts on parole by acknowledging that she was heavily

involved in reentry programing, which may have made her PO feel their job was

done for them. Amy notably had a very long history with justice involvement and

recidivism, so she was surprised at how little support and supervision she got.

When asked about the extent she interacted with her PO, Trisha, a 45-year-old

white woman with over a decade of justice involvement, similarly recounts:

We would meet at the mall parking lot, and I'd get out of my car, and I

would sign that I was there, and he would ask me a few questions, and I

was done, back in my car, and I'd leave. He'd say, 'see you in 2, 3

months. I'll check in and let you know (when).' And I'd be meeting right

back at the mall the next month."

Notably, Trisha was a high-level drug dealer with a history of recidivism yet had little oversite or assistance from her PO. Thus, parole officers seldom performed their duties of oversight or provided support. When considering this finding in tandem with the pains of parole women discussed, parole rarely served its function of protecting the community and only operated to make reentry more difficult.

Parole also had negative impacts on women's personal social networks. Women reported being less willing to form romantic relationships when they felt their PO would interfere. Latasha, a 47-year-old Black woman, said her PO outright forbid her from dating her first year out. She also noted her reticence to form a relationship due to vicarious experiences of her friends who formed relationships and had constant interference by their parole. Lori had a similar experience. After returning from prison, she quickly started a relationship with a man who was also on parole. After violating her parole by spending the night with him, Lori was given restrictive sanctions for five months, whereas the man only received two weeks of parole sanctions. The subsequent house arrest not only made it difficult for Lori to reintegrate back into society; it also limited her formation and maintenance of social ties. When asked if she was still interested in finding a romantic partner, she said no.

Beyond the formation of new romantic relationship, parole also limited women's ability to build and maintain other social ties. A common stipulation of parole was that women not have contact with other justice involved persons. While some women were happy to sever ties they perceived as harmful or unhealthy, others felt this prevented them from accessing key supports. Indeed, women often formed deep, supportive

connections with other women in prison. Once released, some were forbidden from having contact with women who were still incarcerated or on parole. Respondents in this situation were particularly upset, as they felt the connections would help them with a prosocial and conventional reentry, rather than encourage recidivism. Past work supports this notion, finding justice involved pairs are particularly helpful in supporting each other toward distance (Leverentz 2006b). Regarding non-justice involved ties, some women felt that their parole officer's extreme oversight and the stigma of parole made them less willing to interact with prosocial friends or even leave the house. Others had restrictions to remain in the city, county, or state years after their release, which lead to their exclusion from bonding opportunities with family and friends.

Taken together, though women initially perceive parole as a potential origin of social support during their reentry, they typically have very little interaction with their parole officer. What interactions women did have were often detrimental to their reentry, as they drained time and mental energy while creating additional barriers for women to overcome. Parole also limited the formation of romantic relationships, which in turn prevents women from building their support network. Likewise, with restrictions on who women could be in contact with, parole severed many women from key informal social supports, ultimately making women more isolated during their reentry. In all, the findings suggest a need to reevaluate how parole officers navigate supporting women in reentering the community.

Programming. In prison, women were told by prison employees and group facilitators that there are many programs available to support reentry. However, women

had mixed results accessing reentry programming for social support once released. Select few felt programming meet their needs during reentry (n=3). Women who did feel as such received a wide array of social support through reentry programs. Most women received at least one form of reentry support, but felt it was insufficient to meet their needs. Reentry programing rarely met every need, but individual programs provided informational, emotional, and instrumental support. Appraisal support is highly subjective and considered poor practice among social work professionals. Thus, this variety of support is not captured for formal support providers.

The most readily available form of support through reentry programming was informational. This included teaching women how to create a resume, apply for jobs, use new technology, budget, pay bills, get their driver's license, complete their education, and other general life skills. Informational support was also provided through networking women with felon-friendly employers, landlords, and vocational learning opportunities. A particularly beneficial form of informational support women discussed was being assigned a peer mentor to guide them through their reentry and serve as a point of contact for questions and directing women to additional resources.

The next most common form of support offered by programming was emotional support. Emotional support was provided through mental health counseling, therapy groups, and drug recovery programs. Laila, a 26-year-old Black woman, noted her recovery program was central for combatting social isolation during reentry, stating, "going back to the society you have few friends. No one wants to get involved or interact with a criminal, someone has never been to prison (that is). And you just have so few

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friends, if you want someone to talk to, these drug recovery programs have been at that. They have been therapeutic." Laila also felt her recovery program was an important outlet for processing her experiences with the justice system and the stigma she has received from her community during her reentry. Trisha also had a positive experience with a recovery program. She noted that if she ever felt overwhelmed, hopeless, or at risk of relapse, she could always rely on programming to support her. Of note, most women who praised the emotional support they received were in a drug recovery program. Many women felt there were no options outside of addiction counseling to receive formal mental support.

Instrumental support was primarily seen through transitional housing programs that not only provided housing, but also food and necessities. Other less common forms of instrumental support were rent and bill assistance, transportation, and fundraisers to help purchase large items of necessity (E.g., Car to get to work, fridge for an apartment). For example, Theresa, a 24-year-old white woman, was immediately referred to a program on release that paid for six months of rent and utilities in a new town, which allowed her to move away from the community where she was heavily involved in drugs. Likewise, Lori received substantial support with housing and bills, in addition to assistance buying a new car and fridge. Conversely, LaTasha had a different experience and vented, "there is not as much informational and financial support as you would think coming out of prison." Thus, the level of instrumental support women received varied substantially.

Given the beneficial impact reentry programs had on women's reentry, the question becomes why more women did not utilize this programing. Women adopted either of two narratives for the lack of formal support: insufficient programs and lack of knowledge. Beginning with the first narrative, women frequently felt the programs they were linked with failed to help them with their transition. Cammy, a 33-year-old white woman, noted that the people who ran reentry programs struck her as disingenuous. She elaborated, "They would tell me they would do these things, but when you went home and reached out to them, they weren't genuine […] If your situation is unique and they had to work a little bit harder… I don't feel like they go out of their way to do that. I just think it was all blown up; if you're in (prison) and you think you have the support and then you come home and try to utilize that support, they don't come through." Likewise, Jada, a 33-year-old Black woman, was part of a ministry group in prison and the church promised her support during her transition home. When she tried to contact them, they did not respond to her emails and her the phone calls never reached anyone. She reflected, "there's already such a limited amount of resources, so to think that you might have access to one just to never be available, or for it to be impossible to get a hold of people, that was a little bit discouraging." Like Jada and Cammy, Laura a 38-year-old white woman, sought mental health counseling through a reentry program and was told "you don't need to be here" after they completed her initial assessment. Not only was counseling a requirement of her parole, but she also felt it was needed for her own wellbeing. This left Laura to find a therapist and finance the care on her own.

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Women were particularly disappointed by their half-way houses. Carmen, a 25-year-old Latina, went as far to say that "they don't do anything to help you return back to society." She felt that any time she would ask for basic assistance, such as getting a social security card, the half-way house employees would do nothing. She added, "Okay, you're at the half-way house and just sit there for 6 months […] What they're advertising to be a halfway house, and all that, they didn't do any of that at all. And a lot of the people in there, even the ones that were doing the right thing will tell you that same thing. You sit in a room, you go to work, you come back, and that's that. There's nothing." Kristin, a 32-year-old white woman, also grew frustrated with having to do all her own research and networking at her halfway house. Overall, women often felt they would do the staff's jobs for them, not only finding their own support, but also helping newer housemates.

Regarding lack of knowledge, some women were unaware what programs existed or were unsure how to access programs they had heard about. Tia, a 20-year-old Black woman, had all but one person in her personal network sever ties with her during her incarceration, leaving her extremely isolated and with scant resources. When asked if she had turned to any reentry programs for support, she responded that she didn't know of any. She made one friend in prison, but the friend also knew of no programming that could help them transition back to their community. This friend was also in the sample, and she similarly expressed feeling lost when it came to finding reentry assistance in her community.[6]

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[6] The friend will not be named in the context of this story, as knowing the respondents are connected may make identifying them easier.

With little assistance from prison employees in building connections with reentry programs, the onus of finding formal support was placed on women themselves. LaTasha spoke at length about the importance of networking with peers and programs while still in prison:

> But the emotional, informational, resource support... you are not getting
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> that in prison. They will not hit you upside the head with it. You have to
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> search it out and basically beg for a lot of it to even get the information so
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> when you get out you can call. They don't make it available, and if it is,
>
> it's hidden.

LaTasha felt that if she had not proactively networked in the years preceding her release, she would not have sufficient formal reentry support.

Participating in in-prison programing facilitated by organizations that also ran reentry programming allowed women to build relationships with providers, assuring their support during reentry. This was particularly helpful in securing a spot in programing with limited space, such as transitional living facilities. Women who felt they had a close relationship with reentry staff also received a larger variety of formal support than women seeking support from the same program with no pre-existing bonds to the program, suggesting program resources are allocated more freely to women who established rapport with the organization prior to transitioning into the community. Networking with other incarcerated women also resulted in more post-prison program opportunities, as women frequently referred each other to programs. Thus, the women who did not actively plan their release while incarcerated often did not know what

programs existed and lacked the social capital needed to gain entry to more exclusive programs. Therefore, women with longer sentences and older women were far more likely to leverage reentry programing due to greater in-prison networks. This trend will be further explored in chapter four.

Interestingly, women who were more pessimistic about available formal support often received more formal support, as they actively sought out providers while still incarcerated. Conversely, women who expected support would be readily available did little to prepare for their reentry. Of concern, women who expected formal support but did not receive any expressed feeling more hopeless than other women in the sample. Others had seen so many other women struggle with programing they didn't bother trying to participate in any themselves. When asked if she utilized reentry programing, Trisha laughed, stating "No, because I knew I wouldn't get it through the system. It's just a revolving loophole, you know. So, I just gave up. I just didn't see nothing coming out of it." Taken together, most women who received support felt it was only because they worked hard in prison to get it, whereas women who did not receive formal support felt it was because social institutions failed them in some capacity.

In sum, the receipt of formal social support is highly variable for women during reentry. Women often expect their parole officer and reentry programming to provide more support than ultimately received. Overall, parole offered very little support for any of the women in this sample. Rather, when parole was mentioned, it was typically in the context of hindering reentry. Reentry programming was immensely helpful, but only to the small sub-sample who knew where to find formal reentry assistance benefited from

this source of support. Failure to receive formal support often left women feeling

hopeless and directionless, indicating the importance of fostering greater access to formal

support.

Informal Support

The most common person reentering women turned to for assistance was their

mother, with 45% of women nominating their mother in their top three supports and an

additional 15% nominating their parents as a unit. Only two women specifically

nominated their father. The next most common source of social support was their

siblings[7] and close female friends, which were both nominated by 40% of respondents.

Regarding nominated friends, five of the eight friends nominated in women's top three

networks were justice involved women. This was closely followed by support from a

romantic partner, with 35% of women nominating their boyfriend, husband, or girlfriend

as a key support.[8] Other less common network supports women nominated included aunts

and uncles, cousins, the fathers of their children, the women dating the fathers of their

children, adult children, their minister, and their therapist. Consistent with past research

finding that reentering women rely heavily on female family members (Valera et al.

2015), I find that 44.68% of women's top three nominations included female family

members, with 61.70% consisting of combined female family members and female

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[7] Only two of the nine nominated siblings were male, indicating sisters are far more likely to support women during reentry.

[8] Note that these proportions represent the number of women in the sample who nominated the tie type in their top three, not the percent of all network ties that were of that variety.

friends. Thus, the majority of women's social support when transitioning from prison is provided by female network members.

Importantly, not all women were able to identify three people that provided support. Indeed, three women were only able to identify one or two network members who provided support. In addition, five women nominated a formal support in their top three support network, with two women naming only programs as supports and one naming only programs and her work (she worked for a reentry program) as her supports. Taken together, 40% of the sample did not have access to much, if any social support from their personal networks, placing them in a uniquely vulnerable position during their reentry. This lack of access to social network ties is in large part related to network attrition occurring for women in the later life stage, which Chapter 4 will illuminate.

Parents. As theorized above, different types of social tie typically provide varied forms and extent of support. In line with past work (Clone and DeHart 2014; Goodson 2018; Shollenberger 2009), parents were most likely to be nominated in women's top three network, comprising nearly 27% of all support nominations with 60% of women nominating at least one parent as a top supporter. Mothers were particularly helpful and more likely to provide a range of support across all four forms of social support. To emphasize the extent her mother helped her, Gabrielle, a 28-year-old Black woman, nominated her mother twice, refusing to give a third nomination. When fathers were mentioned, it was almost exclusively regarding the provision of instrumental support. Only one woman cited having a close emotional bond with her father and regular visitation from him during her incarceration. Beyond fathers providing fewer forms of

support and being viewed as less emotionally accessible, some women had absent fathers, making fathers less likely to be in women's social networks than mothers.

Parents most commonly provided instrumental support. Women often viewed their parents as a first place of contact during their reentry, turning to them for immediate housing and financial support. Though only four women lived with their parents at the time of their interview, most lived with their parents for some period immediately after returning to the community. Even those who no longer live with their parents still received housing support in the form of rent assistance or using their parents' name on their lease to avoid criminal record discrimination. Most women also received other forms of financial assistance from their parents, as needed. The use of vehicles and transportation were also provided by parents, though some parents withheld this support to restrict their daughter's movements. Parents were also important providers of childcare during incarceration and while women focused on their reentry. Indeed, multiple women attributed their healthy relationships with their children as resulting from their parents determined efforts to keep them connected to their child while in prison. In two less common cases, mothers were also heavily involved in helping their daughters run or start a business during their incarceration or reentry.

The second most common support parents provided was emotional support. Adaline, a 28-year-old white woman, chose to live with her parents in part to have quick access to emotional support, as she felt her social anxiety was detrimental to her success. She added, "I can trust my parents […] You know, if I'm having a bad day…like I'm a big kid at heart. I always want my mom. Now my mom's right there. I'm going through

some health issues, so that's nice to be able to have her right there and knowing that I'll be able to come home right to my mom." Imani, a 26-year-old Black woman, shared Adaline's sentiment, telling me that she lived with her parents because she "needed that support from family, and someone I could talk to. So that's why I'm living with (them), they support me emotionally."

Parents also provided emotional support through encouragement. Jada describes this encouragement being crucial when she feels like giving up:

> I'm just done with all this. I'm done trying. And then my phone goes off, and it's my little sister, or my mom, or my dad, like, 'Hey! I just want to let you know I'm proud of you. You're doing amazing things.' And then I'm like okay, there's a reason I'm doing this. It's so sad to me that people don't have that."

Savanah also noted she took solace in her parents regularly encouraging her and saying, "they would be there no matter what."

Despite the above testimonies, women were not nearly as likely to view their parents as a viable source of emotional support relative to instrumental. When asking women why they did not consider their parents as sources of emotional support, they noted that their parents were often not able to relate to them the same way people with their age or experiences can. Others felt their parents were too judgmental to confide in. For example, Kiara, a 21-year-old Black woman, felt that her parents were constantly searching for reasons to view her as "evil." Likewise, despite considering her mother her greatest support, Gabrielle still did not feel she could share her history of sexual abuse

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and drug use, because she thinks her mother would treat her differently. Thus, I find mixed evidence that parents are a source of emotional support for women during reentry.

Though appraisal support was seldom directly mentioned regarding parents, women often received unsolicited opinions from their parents on how they should structure their lives and who they should interact with. In this event, women considered the appraisals infantilizing and frustrating, viewing this as more of a burden than support. This is illustrated by women not wishing to live with their parents longer than needed, as they felt space from constant feedback was needed for a successful reentry and maintaining healthy relationships with their parents. Other women felt their parents gave them valuable advice about future planning and drug recovery. Taken together, parents often offered appraisals, but whether the appraisals were considered a source of social support was largely dependent on the type of relationship women had with their parents.

Parents rarely were able to link their daughters with formal reentry support and community resources. They also provided little assistance in the way of connecting women with employment, thus they were often perceived as not providing informational support. However, as Theresa points out, parents were particularly important for teaching life skills, such as how to live independently, pay bills, or schedule appointments. Therefore, the provision of informational support varies across the type of information women need. As women's knowledgebase and needs are life-stage dependent, this will be further unpacked in chapter four.

One reason parents were routinely nominated in women's top three supports is that they were the most likely to remain in women's social networks throughout their

justice involvement. As Laila describes, "the members of my extended family somehow stigmatized me. But my dad and my mom did not. There were some members of our extended family or the friends to my parents who stigmatized me for having gone to prison coming back again […] I did not depend on those other members of my extended family or those family friends. I had my parents, and they are always willing to help me." In conclusion, parents are not only the readiest providers of social support; they are also the most likely to remain consistent supporters throughout women's justice involvement, demonstrating the durability of the daughter-parent bond.

Siblings. Of women's biological family, siblings were the next most likely to be nominated as key sources of support, comprising approximately 14% of women's top three support network ties. Like parents, siblings were often nominated as providing instrumental and emotional support. In the event parents were unwilling to provide support or in cases where women did not want to return to their parent's neighborhood, siblings often fulfilled the needs a parent might meet, including providing housing, food, financial assistance, and other necessities. Siblings were often less judgmental, making women more willing to share intimate thoughts and seek emotional and appraisal support from their siblings. Again, sisters were more likely to be perceived as emotional confidants than brothers, who like fathers typically provided instrumental support. Like parents, siblings also rarely had the knowledge to offer informational support. However, siblings were more likely to support their sisters by doing research for job opportunities, housing, and programming than parents. This may be in part due to younger generations being more proficient at technology and internet use.

Notably, women often had many siblings, but only nominated one or two in their network. For example, Jada had nine siblings, but only felt like one sister was a notable source of support. Thus, while siblings play a salient role for women, it is important to acknowledge that many siblings were not considered as sources of support for their sisters. Another factor to note is that all siblings nominated in women's top three support network ties were adult siblings. Though Laila did not nominate her brother in her top three, she felt it was important to note that living with her non-adult brother inspired her to seek out support from others, as she wanted to be a good role model for him. Carmen, a 25-year-old Latina, also highlighted her juvenile siblings as motivation for change. Both women considered this drive to be a role model as form of emotional support provided by their younger sibling.

Extended Family. Women's non-nuclear family were the least likely to be nominated in women's top three support networks tie, comprising only 7% of women's top three networks. When women included extended family in their network, the family member was almost always identified as being an aunt, further demonstrating the increased reliance on female connections. Though grandparents were never nominated as part of women's top three network ties, two women gave their grandparents an honorable mention as people they could turn to if other network members were unavailable or when the need was for a small, sporadic amounts of support.

Importantly, extended family members were never nominated as women's top source of support even in the rare cases when they were included as part of women's top three network ties, suggesting extended family played a less important support role

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compared to other network members. All three aunts were considered emotional support sources, particularly in providing positive reinforcement and validating women's work toward a conforming lifestyle. Two of the nominated aunts also provided informational support by helping women find reentry programming and work. Only one aunt provided instrumental support in letting her niece stay with her until alternate housing was found. Turning to the male extended family supports (uncle and cousin), like fathers, they only provided instrumental support, financially assisting Carmen when she asked for this type of help.

A salient reason for the lack of extended family in women's top three support network ties emerged when women were asked if there were any people in their network that hindered their reentry. A common theme women identified here was that their extended family members were highly judgmental of their justice involvement. Women's poor treatment by their extended family ranged from whispered rumors to complete ostracization. Not only were the women themselves negatively impacted, but their mothers were also criticized for raising a wayward daughter.

Taken together, although extended family were less important sources of support during women's reentry compared to the support offered by their nuclear family, many women reported some instances where extended family members, especially aunts stepped up and provided support when other network members refused or were unable to do so. Limited evidence also suggests extended family may be more beneficial as a source of informational support than are nuclear family members, given 50% of the extended family nominations helped women find programming and felon-friendly

opportunities. This supports past work that suggests extended family may be more integrated into society than nuclear family, making them better positioned to provide informational assistance and social capital (Goodson-Miller 2022; Reisig et al. 2002). While extended family did serve as a helpful resource for some women, most women found them to be detrimental to their reentry. Thus, encouraging bonds with extended family may be more harmful than productive. When considering which women benefited from extended family ties, race proved to be a key divider, which will be discussed in chapter three.

Partners. Romantic partners played a large role in supporting women, comprising 14% of women's top three supporters,[9] which is more than estimated by past work (Clone and DeHart 2014; Goodson-Miller 2022). Though partners were identified as being among women's top three network ties at the same rate as friends and siblings, they often provided less variety of social support. Partners were most often cited as providing emotional support, yet women were less likely to report that they relied on their partner for instrumental support. This is a bit surprising as eight of the women lived with their partners and either split expenses or had partners cover all living expenses, making partners twice as likely to provide housing support compared to that provided by any other relationship type. Likewise, women commented that their partners contributed to other household expenses, such as paying bills and buying groceries. Only one woman considered her partner as a source of informational support[10], and none discussed partners

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[9] The use of the term "partner" is intentional, as only one woman was married and non-marital partners had varying gender identities.
[10] This partner was an employee of a reentry program she attended, making him more knowledgeable of resources than other partners.

as providing appraisal support, suggesting partners were primarily providing emotional and instrumental support.

Past work is inconsistent on the extent that women rely on their partners for support (Goodson 2018; La Vigne 2009; Valera et al. 2015; Wright et al. 2013). This is likely in part due to the time that passed since release and relationship formation. Like previous work (Arditti and Few 2006; Huebner and Pleggenkuhle 2015; La Vigne et al. 2005), women's romantic relationships rarely survived incarceration, resulting in 75% of non-single women beginning their relationships post-incarceration. It often took women time to find a partner, with only 40% of women having a romantic partner during their first year of release, relative to two thirds of women having partners if they had been released for 1-3 years. Thus, reliance on romantic relationships for social support likely varies depending on how long women have been released.

Supporting this, the only two women in a relationship who were released within a year of their interview, expressed that they felt it would be inappropriate to rely on their partner for anything other than emotional support since they were in early stages of their relationships. This suggests women newly released from prison or those in early stages of their partnered relationship will have less available social support from romantic partners. On the other hand, there was also some evidence that women were less likely to rely on their romantic partner for re-entry support the longer they had been in the community. For example, Jada had a boyfriend who she lived with, but felt he played a minimal part in her reentry efforts as she had been out of prison for almost a year before meeting him. Thus, he was not included in her top three network support ties, as she was more in need

of social support during the first year of her release. Women also noted having lest trust in male partners due to victimization by past boyfriends, which impacted women's willingness to depend on them. In Adeline's case, her partner was incarcerated, which prevented her from receiving more than emotional support. In all, although romantic partners provided crucial sources of emotional and instrumental support for some women, most women in this study did not depend on their partners to the same extent as they did for their nuclear family or close friends. Partners also did not provide the same variety of supports as provided by other network ties.

Close Friends. Friends were also a substantial part of women's social support network, comprising 14% of women's top three network ties. Close friends often filled the same support roles as family, with many women considering them closer than family. This is unsurprising, as extensive work finds incarcerated women form "pseudo-family" relationships with other incarcerated women (Collica 2010; Forsyth and Evans 2003; Giallombardo 1966; Hart 1995). Interestingly, familial-like support was not limited to friends women met during prison, as all three woman who nominated long-term prosocial friendships formed prior to prison also consider their friends to be like family. Gabrielle, sums this up well, stating that her best friend "has always been there for me, even when I was in prison. I'd say she visited even more than my mother. She was like a family, more than some family members."

Close friends provided all four forms of support to varying extents. Like sisters, women felt friends were more approachable for emotional support than their parents, perceiving friends as less judgmental and not asserting expectations or rules upon them.

Friends also provided substantial instrumental support, primarily in the form of financial assistance or transportation, with friends also providing short-term housing in a few instances. Friends were typically more connected to community resources than women's families, as exhibited by them more commonly providing informational support. Notably, non-justice involved friends did not provide informational support. Appraisal support was mentioned the least, but friends were the only group women consistently felt they could turn to for unbiased advice or for someone to "tell them how it is."

Friendships with women who had also been in the justice system were uniquely identified as important supports for two reasons: First, these friends understood what it was like to be a woman coming home from prison and were aware of the barriers their friend would face during re-entry. Second, women with justice involvement had more knowledge of reentry programs and support, making them a pivotal source of informational support. As a result, these types of friends were identified as a preferred source of emotional support, as well as providing an important source of informational support.

Adeline described why she felt more comfortable receiving emotional support from other justice involved women:

> I feel like they are more understanding of things I still struggle with. I wasn't (in prison) that long, but I still struggle with big crowds. And it sounds crazy, but like a golden corral, or any like buffet restaurant where you have to potentially stand in line to really to be able to get something. It reminds me of prison, and I hate it so much. I won't go in there because

I struggle so bad with it, and 'my mom's like oh, come on it's just on your

head', because she doesn't understand, she's never been in that situation

Tia also disclosed a similar sentiment, feeling that it was impossible to make and

maintain non-justice involved friends the instant they learned she had been to prison.

Likewise, Amy shared her experiences with struggling to make friends since her release.

She found that many interactions with non-justice involved people discredited her notable

trauma history and framed it with more agency than she felt was accurate, particularly

regarding her decade of being sex trafficked by abusive boyfriends. Amy elaborated:

I have a few people that don't 100% understand my whole human

trafficking background, because people hear human trafficking, and they

think "Taken". And they think, 'oh, well, like you weren't literally forced

to do it. So that was just a choice you make.' But it's not just a choice you

make! Get some education!

Because of how her community treated her when she shared her history, like Adeline and

Tia, Amy felt it was easier to relate to justice involved women and receive emotional

support from them.

The shared experience of prison life also served as a unique bonding experience,

with some women feeling like they built deeper connections with other formerly

incarcerated women than they did with other types of relationships. For instance, Kristin

had been heavily involved in drug use for 13 years prior to her incarceration, leaving her

with few remaining social ties after incarceration. She noted, "the people who stayed

(with her in prison) developed this bond of sisterhood, and you open (yourself to) trust

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and relationships. I could really fall back on people like this, you know. And these are people who messed up too. You know what I mean? I don't have to put up such a wall anymore." Kristin further discussed how finding a woman with a similar past as her was particularly helpful for her emotional wellbeing, "I met her, and she and I clicked because prostitution came from our background. It just felt like one broken story, after a broken story finally healed us together. […] It really opened my eyes. Like, I'm not the only one struggling."

LaTasha likewise found the women she met inside prison to be her biggest supporters, describing a wide network of women who uplift each other during prison and reentry by connecting them with formal resources. In particular, she identified a close friend who was released years before her. When LaTasha left prison, this friend became a mentor and served as a roadmap to change. As someone who had experienced reentry herself, the friend was an immense informational support, directing LaTasha to helpful reentry programming and resources. Laura also felt her friends she met on the inside were central to finding resources on the outside. In addition to connecting her with formal resources, the women she met in prison helped her find both felon-friendly landlords and employers.

In sum, women received substantial support from their close friends during reentry. Support received from friends was most commonly in the form of emotional support, though friends often provided multiple forms of support. Some friends even provided more support than parents, suggesting close friends play a larger role in women's reentry than observed by past work (Goodson 2018; Valera et al. 2015).

Notably, while non-justice involved friends were still considered central supports, they often did not offer as much or as varied forms of support as women's justice involved friends. This has considerable policy implications, as many women discussed lacking access to relations they considered important sources of social support but who remained incarcerated or on parole, as their parole expectations prohibited contact. Thus, women may be restricted from accessing one of their most crucial sources of reentry support, friendships that were formed while incarcerated,

Loose Ties. Though the focus of this study was on top three network support ties, women also brought up additional distant connections that played a pivotal part in their reentry beyond their top three nominations. Prior to incarceration, Trisha did in-house patient care for a living. After her release, she found no care-work institutions would hire felons. However, her sister's friend worked for a woman who was looking for in-home care, and Trisha was suggested. Trisha was candid about her past during her interview, and the woman felt that the personal reference of her housekeeper was more than enough to vouch for Trisha's character, so she was hired. Savanah, a 23-year-old Black woman, also found distant friends were helpful in learning what businesses in her community were hiring.

In a similar vein, Amy was commiserating with a client about her difficulty finding opportunities due to her felony stigma and mentioned her struggles to find adequate housing. She vented, "They just see my record, and are like, 'audios'. I really just need to find a private landlord that I can be like, 'hey, let me talk to (the landlord). Let me tell you about my conviction and let me tell you what I've done differently before

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you see it on paper.' Because on paper it looks real ugly." After hearing Amy say she

wanted to find a landlord who would take her rehabilitation progress into account, Amy's

client connected Amy with her son, who ended up leasing her "the cutest" apartment.

Extended family, distant friends, and neighbors also often fell into the loose tie

category, as some women felt they were part of a community that provided support but

that did not regularly meet their day-to-day needs. When discussing her extended family

as sources of support during reentry, Jada noted that though her distant family largely

ignored her during incarceration, "coming home they were also a huge support system.

When I came home there was some family like 'oh here's a housewarming gift', or 'here's

some money, get you an outfit or a gift card, whatever you need.'" She also was referred

to reentry programs through her more distant relatives.

An unexpected origin of social support that was identified by some of the women

was online acquaintances or communication platforms found via the internet. Social

interactions were a point of stress for some women during reentry, which prevented them

from seeking social support via their social networks and left others with few network

ties to pull from. Internet support groups, chat rooms, and YouTube videos became a

salient provision of social support for these women. Laila, a woman who noted she felt

she had no informal sources of support who she could fully trust, said that watching

YouTube videos of other women discussing their experiences of reentry functioned as a

form of emotional support by "helping (her) understand the journey back home." Others

found YouTube videos were not only a source of inspiration, but also a source of

informational support as they helped the women find resources and strategies for reentry

success by watching videos of other women describing their experiences. Similarly, online chat groups for previously incarcerated women and women with incarcerated partners functioned both as an outlet for women to provide emotional and appraisal support to each other, and as a hub for sharing resources.

Taken together, though weak ties were not regularly relied upon, they often played an important role in connecting women with conventional opportunities. This is consistent with past work suggesting larger social networks allow for the greater accumulation of social capital, as these types of social connections provided additional resources not available through close network ties (Grannovetter 1973; Reisig et al. 2002). Given the importance of loose ties and the difference in types of support depending upon tie strength, future social support research should continue to explore the role of tie strength in the type and variety of social support women receive during their reentry (Goodson-Miller 2022).

Network Attrition. Consistent with past literature, all women in the study experienced network attrition to some extent during their incarceration (La Vigne et al. 2005; Sykes 1958; Widleman and Wakefield 2013). The level of network erosion varied across time spent in prison, age, drug history, and race. The variation in network composition across time in prison, age, and race will be detailed in chapter four. For all women, it was common for network ties to be severed by both the woman or their acquaintance during the period of incarceration. Women typically knifed off ties from past romantic partners who were abusive or criminogenic. They were also less likely to maintain ties with people they used to engage in criminal activity or drug use with. When

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asked if anyone she had in her network made staying sober more difficult, Laila made it clear she did not want people in her life who encouraged her drug use: "No, I know no one. I completely cut ties with them. I don't wanna follow up with their lives or try contacting them or making any contact with them, because I'm just trying to get over that and to make a purpose for life. So, it starts by like cutting the connections completely, so that I can start a good life and be a good person who doesn't use drugs. If I end up, maybe trying to contact them, I get myself back again into the same mess that I was in back then."

Monique is a 28-year-old Black woman also cut ties to avoid recidivism when she learned that her close friend was responsible for turning her in to law enforcement which resulted in her 6-year prison sentence. When asked if any relationships made her reentry more difficult, she said, "yea, some friends they wasn't friends for real, for I just thought they were[...] Like one friend I got locked up for. She told on me, and it just hurts you to the core. You know I didn't expect that, and I was only trying to defend her." When asked how this relationship impacted her reentry, Monique clarified, "I mean because I would make dumb decisions sometimes. You know, like try to get revenge." She ultimately decided it was best to move to a new city where she did not regularly see the people she felt betrayed her, so she was not tempted to retaliate.

The most common reason for women to refuse contact with past ties was feeling abandoned or betrayed by them, particularly if the individual did not remain in contact during their incarceration. Kiara had no visits from her extended family when she was in prison. Reflecting on the experience, she said "I was feeling bad, you know. I could see

other people's families coming to visit them, but mine wasn't coming. The feeling wasn't good." When asked how this impacted her reentry, Kiara elaborated that they did not treat her well when she got out, so now she has no contact with them.

After scant contact during her incarceration, Cammy was unsure what her relationship with her once-close grandmother would be like during reentry. Like Kiara, the treatment she received from her grandmother during or after incarceration made her decide to sever the tie. She described the breaking point at a family gathering:

I saw my grandma for the first time, and she acted real funny towards me. I think it may be because people were there and a lot of people my family don't like me because of the things I've done. So, I don't know if she's trying to put on a front but that completely turned me off, and I know that's f****d up to say, but I really don't talk to my grandma anymore.

When asked to describe how their relationships changed because of prison, all women had at least one person cease contact with them during their imprisonment. Though some of these contacts tried to rekindle their relationships post-release, most women felt that failure to visit them in prison meant the tie was not worth maintaining, resulting in them permanently severing the tie. Women's active attempts at reforming bonds was primarily seen with parents, siblings, and children, indicating the desire to connect with immediate family was enough to overcome the rejection they felt while incarcerated.

The stigma of justice involvement was the primary reason for ties to remove themselves from women's social networks. Stigma-based erosion was most common

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among weak-ties such as distant friends or relatives, but also included parents, siblings, and children. Adeline describes her stark network attrition, stating, "I don't really go hang out with people or talk to people. I feel like just a lot of people were like, 'Oh, wow! She's been to prison!' Like people I'd never thought would turn their back on me. They judged me and turned their turn their back on me." Regarding her extended family, Cammy added, "I'm the only person in my entire family that's ever been to prison […] They don't really f*** with me, that's cool I don't f*** with them either […] But I just feel like an embarrassment, something they can talk about, the black sheep, entertainment, even I don't know." When asked if stigma impacted her network, Kiara bluntly replied, "Yeah, I don't have friends now. My boyfriend is gone." Savanah did try to reconnect with her friends, but quickly gave up after feeling they would rather her not be there. Tia expressed how the isolation stemming from stigma makes her unwilling to even leave her house. She elaborated, "What has been difficult to me is coping with the fact that I have to be alone most of the time. Back then, before I got in, I had friends. I used to play basketball. And after that happening, I can't even go to (the basketball) court." In all, stigma dramatically reduced women's access to social support and social capital, particularly among loose ties.

Network attrition was most severe for women with extensive drug use histories (n=13). These women regularly reported severing network ties due to their peer's negative influence, especially regarding exposure to drug use. Women with drug abuse histories also reported that they felt their drug using network ties had an "out of sight, out of mind" mentality, meaning once they were incarcerated, it was like they no longer

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existed. They also described more immediate family relationship conflict, citing their frequent incarceration, instability, heavy reliance on family, and victimization of family as reasons their family kept them at arm's length. Notably, having missed a large portion of their child's upbringing, children were also less likely to have interest in reforming relationships with mothers who have drug histories. However, despite women's narratives of their drug use impacting their social networks, a closer examination of their top three support nominations reveals they still commonly receive support at similar rates to reentering women with no drug histories.

When breaking out the distribution of top three support nominations across women who had a history with drug use relative to those who do not, little variation is present. Only half of the women who could not name three supports had a history with drug use, suggesting drug use is not the driving factor of close support network attrition, considering 60% of the sample used drugs. They were also no more likely to nominate formal supports as among their top three supporters. Parsing out top three nominations by tie type further illuminates substantial similarities. Regardless of drug use history, women report similar reliance on their parents, romantic partners, and formal social supports. The only slight variation is women with drug histories are 5% more likely to nominate a friend in their top three and 5% less likely to nominate siblings than woman with no history of drug use. Cammy suggests this may be in part due to pro-social siblings growing tired with the drug using sibling requiring so much family support, leading them to become an estranged tie.

In all, the findings suggest women's network attenuation during incarceration is driven by two key factors: Loose ties and relationship conflict. Given that most women still maintained their core support networks, most attenuation was with looser ties that were not as closely bonded to women. Moreover, most women still maintained connections with their core networks even when there was conflict, suggesting that relationship quality decline is more common than complete tie erosion with core network members. Of note, women with drug use histories had more tumultuous relationships, suggesting they may have more tie erosion and conflictual relationships. Thus, women with drug use histories may have fewer loose ties that can confer social capital and opportunities and may have more difficulty leveraging support from their core networks. Chapter three will illuminate how women navigate these conflictual relationships within their core support networks.

Taken together, women's social support networks are significantly smaller during reintegration than pre-incarceration due to both the women and their ties decisions to cut the tie. Notably, the ties women elected to sever were commonly ties with friends, romantic partners, and extended family. It was rare for relationships with children or nuclear family members to be ended by incarcerated women, barring extreme abuse or childhood abandonment. Network members who distanced themselves from incarcerated women were also most likely to be friends and extended family[11]. However, on rare occasions siblings would cut ties if they felt their sibling was too high maintenance after extensive justice involvement. As we will see in chapter three, culture can also impact

[11] It was rare for partners to leave women, as women often separated from them first.

whether parents and siblings remain in a women's network post-prison. In the event of a tie being severed, it is unlikely women will receive any form of social support from that previous tie.

Discussion

Throughout the prison reentry literature, formal and informal social support have been widely researched as key factors in assisting returning citizens with their transition back to the community. Social support is particularly important for women's successful return from prison. Despite the salient role of social support, the form of social support available to women leaving incarceration, the role of those providing it, and whether access to social support is dependent on the relationship tie type has yet to be examined. This study addresses this gap by collecting and analyzing data from 20 in-depth interviews with women previously incarcerated in Ohio. In the analyses for this chapter, I begin by focusing on the extent to which women utilize formal support, the types of support women commonly receive from their formal ties and discuss the barriers women identify as a problem in accessing avenues of formal support. Next, I turn my examination to a focus on women's sources of informal social support and identify the type of relationships that are most often described as providing informal support (E.g., Parents, siblings, extended family, romantic partners, close friends, and loose ties). Similar to my assessment of formal support, I further explore how the relationships by which women access informal support shape the types of social support available to the

women through these network ties. Last, I highlight themes of network attrition that impact the extent of informal support available to women during their reentry.

Sources of formal support were often unavailable or unreliable for aiding women's re-entry process. Women were especially disappointed that their parole officer rarely provided the type of re-entry support the women expected and/or found helpful for their re-entry. Indeed, despite initial expectations that parole officers would be a key resource for connecting women to additional formal supports and felon-friendly opportunities, few women reported receiving this assistance. Instead, parole officers were often identified as hindering women's successful re-entry. This latter finding is consistent with some past work pointing out the obstacles the parole system presents to successful re-entry (Cobbina 2010; Durnescu 2011; McKendy and Ricciardelli 2021) and inconsistent with other research that describes parle officers in a more favorable light aiding in re-entry (Arditti and Few 2006; Cobbina 2010; La Vigne 2009). One possible reason for the inconsistency regarding parole officers as a source of support may have to do with variation in probation officers' roles dependent upon the county or state in which they are employed, as funding, time, and resources can vary substantially across parole jurisdictions. Given the sensitive information discussed, women's specific geographical details were not recorded so this study cannot make inferences on this point. Future research should determine whether parole officer support varies across jurisdiction. It may also be fruitful to explore whether the parole officer support is dependent on either personal attributes of the officer or the women they supervise (E.g., varies across

conviction status, race, age, addiction history, length of justice involvement, caseload, amount of time serving in the role).

Although many respondents reported receiving some assistance from reentry programing, the consensus was that most of women's needs remained unmet by formal resources. When women did receive assistance from reentry programs, it was primarily informational support in the form of teaching life skills and referrals to felon friendly employers or landlords. Emotional support was primarily available through formal support channels to women in drug recovery programs, with women not involved in drug rehabilitation struggling to receive counseling and resources for mental wellbeing. Few women received instrumental support through formal support avenues. In the rare event they did, it was often in the form of initial rent and utility payments to secure housing. In terms of explaining reasons why formal resources were rarely identified as being very helpful for women's re-entry needs, two common themes emerged from the interviews: women either perceived that program staff were not invested in their reentry success or women didn't know about the programs in the first place. Women often felt the onus of accessing re-entry resources was solely their responsibility, either having to do the work they expected of reentry program employees, or actively hunting down the most helpful reentry programs before leaving prison. Further research is needed to explore why more women are not made aware of reentry programs available to them when they re-enter their community. Given the extensive rapport women felt they had to build with program staff during incarceration, it would be fruitful to understand whether these programs could handle a higher capacity of women, or if this is a form of gate keeping designed to

reserve limited spots for the most driven women. Of note, one reason women lacked knowledge of reentry programming may be because women expected this information would be provided to them by their parole officer.

When asked what reentry programs women wished they had access to, women felt housing was the most central need that went unmet, be it immediate housing upon release, or assistance with finding felon friendly landlords. Another highly requested resource was more peer mentoring by women who completed successful community reentry, as women felt it would provide unparalleled informational resources and inspiration. Most also felt they needed more mental health counseling and psychological screenings, with Cammy pointing out "you don't treat the trauma, you're never going to stay clean and you're going back to prison." Women also emphasized the need to get training on how to deal with stigma in their personal networks and communities, with some feeling relational conflict hindered their reentry. Others suggested it would be helpful to have resources for their families to cope with the burdens of supporting someone during reentry. Overall, women emphasized that formal supports needed to have more committed staff, be more accessible, and have a wider variety of services to aid in re-entry.

In line with previous research (Cobbina 2010; Shollenberger 2009; Valera et al. 2015), informal support accessed through women's personal networks was central to their reentry experience. The most prevalent providers of support were women's nuclear family members, with parents most likely to be nominated as among the top three relationships providing informal support important for re-entry success. Siblings were

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also often included as part of the top three network members providing informal support. Notably, mothers and sisters were most often nominated as part of the three most important social ties providing support, with male family members being included far less frequently. Close female friends and romantic partners were nominated at similar rates as siblings. Extended family members were much less likely to be identified as part of women's support network aiding re-entry, with several women noting that extended family made re-entry more difficult.

Consistent with expectations, women typically leveraged distinct social tie types for different forms of social support. Parents were most likely to provide instrumental support and often also provided emotional support. They seldom had the knowledge to provide most informational support but did teach life-skills. Parents appraisal support was mixed, with some women appreciating the feedback parents provided while others viewed it as a source of strain. Siblings and close friends similarly supported women, being their primary source of emotional support and appraisal support. Siblings and friends also provided instrumental and informational support, with siblings more likely to provide the former and friends the later. Romantic partners served as key emotional supports and primarily functioned as instrumental supports by cohabitating with their partners. Though women nominated their romantic partners at the same rates as siblings and friends, women discussed relying on them less than siblings or friends and noted that romantic partners provided fewer types of social support. Extended family were the least likely to be nominated as part of women's top three support networks. However, extended family were more integrated into conventional society and as a result were

sometimes identified as providing valuable sources of informational support and social capital, such as providing important job referrals.

While the focus of this study was on women's core social support networks, women also mentioned that less close ties (what I classify as "loose" ties), such as acquaintances, also played an important role in reentry. Loose ties typically included extended family, neighbors, church communities, and distant friends. Though loose ties did not provide consistent support, they were important loci of social capital. Indeed, with their core networks providing scant informational support, women often felt lost when trying to find resources or felon friendly opportunities. Loose ties were more able to connect women with employment opportunities and diverse resources, making them a valuable asset. Women also highlighted online communities and YouTube videos as another form of loose ties, most often providing informational support, but also occasionally emotional and appraisal support. This highlights an unexplored aspect of women's reentry networks. Research is needed to investigate women's digital networks, including how these networks are formed and maintained, as well as the types of support women receive from participating in these digital communities. Reliance on digital networks may have notable implications, as social media is often banned in prison, thus limiting women's ability to form digital support networks before their return to the community. Further, older women who are not technologically knowledgeable may be unable to access this form of support.

Past research emphasizes the tumultuous relationships incarcerated women have with network ties outside of prison, finding their social networks suffer substantial

attenuation over the period of incarceration (La Vigne et al. 2005; Sykes 1958; Widleman and Wakefield 2013). This is often more marked for those with chronic drug use in their past (Huebner and Pleggenkuhle 2015; Leverentz 2006a; Western 2018). I advance this research by parsing out the differences across loose ties and women's core networks. Notably, the substantial erosion of women's networks is primarily concentrated in loose ties, such as distant friends and extended family. This is particularly true for the women who used drugs with regularity. Most women maintain their core network ties, although women with drug abuse histories had more conflict in even these relationships. In all, with most network erosion occurring among weaker connections, women often maintain key social supports during incarceration but lose substantial social capital stemming from their looser network ties because of their incarceration. With immediate core networks often having little informational resources to provide, this lack of social capital can make reintegration particularly difficult. Of note, this finding suggests past research may overestimate the amount of social support lost due to network attenuation, as distinction was not made between the erosion of close and loose ties (Huebner and Pleggenkuhle 2015; La Vigne et al. 2005; Widleman and Wakefield 2013).

By exploring how women leverage formal and informal social support during reentry, this chapter contributes to the growing body of research on women's reentry needs. Specifically, I assess where women commonly receive instrumental, informational, emotional, and appraisal support across formal support and personal social networks. Through highlighting the factors that shape women's ability to access formal support, I also identify deficits in the varieties of support women can access through

formal avenues. Moreover, by examining the forms of social support provided by

women's top three informal network support ties, it becomes clear that certain

relationships often provide very different types of support. Thus, with limited formal

support, women who lack certain types of social relationships may not have access to all

four forms of social support needed for a successful reentry.

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Chapter 3. Complexity of Social Network Ties and Access to Social Support

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, informal social support is a key predictor of women's success during post-incarceration reentry, with women depending more on close relations than men (Cobbina 2010; La Vigne 2009; Shollenberger 2009). Due to little programming and parole support during their reentry, women's informal networks are the only readily available outlet they can turn to for assistance when returning to society (Goodson et al. 2018; Valera et al. 2017). The prior chapter established which forms of support women commonly received across the spectrum of their relationships, and that the extent of support provided from the same type of tie varied from woman to woman. The question remains why some women were given differential support from the same type of relationship. Limited work suggests the level of social support women receive from their support network is intrinsically linked to relational conflict (Goodson 2018; Falkin and Strauss 2003; Leverentz 2006a, Valera et al. 2015), suggesting friction in relationships can impact women's access to social support during reentry.

In this chapter, I closely examine the role relationship friction plays in women's social support networks and access to social support. Specifically, I explore a concept I term "tie-complexity", which encapsulates social ties women depend on or value highly, yet simultaneously inhibit their reentry in some way. Through this lens, I demonstrate that women's histories of abuse, interpersonal trauma, drug abuse, lack of understanding,

and stigmatized identities largely impact their access to and willingness to accept social support. I further see that women with tie-complexity within their support networks receive less support than women with exclusively positive networks. Of note, I find that Black women have substantially more tie-complexity within their networks. Last, I present evidence that tie-complexity influences who remains in women's top three support network throughout their incarceration and reentry.

Background

Research on women's social support during reentry typically frames ties as positive or negative (Cobbina 2010; Goodson 2018; Salina et al. 2011; Valera et al. 2015). Positive social ties are considered pro-social and confer at least one form of social support that can aid women during their re-entry (Goodson 2018; Valera et al. 2015). Conversely, negative social ties are rooted in conflict, making reentry and conventional living more difficult (Cobbina 2010; Goodson 2018; Valera et al. 2015). Negative ties are often characterized by having exhibited at least one of the following behaviors; physical sexual, or emotional abuse (Browne, Miller, and Maguin 1999; Cobbina 2010; Messina and Grella 2006; Wolff et al. 2010), neglect (Wright et al. 2013), drug or alcohol abuse (Goodson 2018; Salina et al. 2011), criminal engagement (Alarid et al. 2000; Cobinna 2010; Goodson 2018; Jones 2008), volatile or dramatic interactions (Greer 2000; Trammel 2009; Wulf-Ludden 2013), or being highly dependent (Brown and Bloom 2009; Huebner and Pleggenkuhle 2015). For women leaving prison, many of these behaviors are seen across all types of relationships (Valera et al. 2015; Goodson 2018; O'Brien

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2001; Offer and Fischer 2018). When considering that justice-involved women have, on average, one estranged social tie (Goodson-Miller 2022), it is clear negative ties are highly prevalent for women reentering the community.

Though women's reentry and desistance literature has established that different social relationships can positively or negatively affect women's reentry, limited research explores how a single social tie can function beyond the binary understanding of exclusively having a positive or negative impact on women's reentry (Falkin and Strauss 2003; Leverentz 2006a; Wilgning et al. 2016). This is a notable deficit, as women's relationships have considerable complexity and are more likely to have negative elements than male relationships (Kreager et al. 2021; Opsal and Foley 2013). Supporting this notion, studies on women in drug use recovery find that members in their support network often engage in drug use in their presence, in addition to enabling and encouraging women's own use (Goodson 2018; Falkin and Strauss 2003; Leverentz 2006b). Further, Wright et al. (2013) note that previously incarcerated women's relationships with family often have extensive histories of abuse, drug use, and neglect, yet women still rely on them for support. Thus, though women may report members of their social network as a positive social tie and turn to them for social support, it is an omission to not investigate if the social ties are exclusively positive and if not, how the tie influences women's reentry. Given this notion of ties having elements of positive and negative impacts on women's reentry has been previously undiscussed, I coin the term "tie-complexity" for ease of interpretation henceforth.

Importantly, tie-complexity can be perceived by either or both the returning woman and members of her support network. Incarcerated women themselves may keep a relationship at arm's length for their own mental wellbeing and safety, as they may have trauma and abuse histories with members in their support network (Belknap and Holsinger 2006; McDaniels-Wilson and Belknap 2008). Likewise, women may intentionally reduce involvement with ties who still engage in criminal behavior or drug use (Cobinna 2010; Jones 2008; Maruna and Roy 2007; Valera et al. 2015). In a similar vein, social ties that demand substantial time or emotional labor can make reentry more difficult and heighten psychological distress (Brown and Bloom 2009; Durden et al. 2007; Huebner and Pleggenkuhle 2015). The strain on relationships can also stem from women feeling guilt over the suffering their social ties experienced related to their criminality (Petersson, Berg, and Skårner 2021). In all, due to heightened relationship strain and related emotional distress, women perceiving tie-complexity in a relationship may be less willing to turn to a tie for social support. Moving forward, I refer to tie-complexity perceived by incarcerated women as "outdegree complexity".

Conversely, tie-complexity may also restrict the provision of social support if the reentering woman is viewed negatively by members of their network. Indeed, some studies suggest that frequent incarceration and drug use lead family and friends to distance themselves emotionally and financially from reentering women (Huebner and Pleggenkuhle 2015; Leverentz 2006a; Western 2018). The responsibility and stigma of caring for women during reentry can also negatively impact the mental state of social support members, particularly if they lack the resources and information to do so

(Willgning et al. 2016). Last, the separation from family during incarceration can also lead to tension during reentry, particularly among ties that felt abandoned (Valera et al. 2015). Therefore, the social networks of women perceived as a negative tie may be less willing to provide social support than the networks of women appraised more positively. Continuing, "indegree complexity" will refer to social relationships where a tie-complexity is perceived by members of incarcerated women's social networks.

Notably, negative interactions with social network members have a greater impact on mental health than positive and supportive interactions (Bertera 2005), suggesting relationships with tie-complexity may be more harmful than helpful to women's post-prison reintegration. Further, dysfunctional relationships can reduce self-efficacy, raise anxiety and depression, contribute to substance abuse, and ultimately lead women to further criminal activities (Salisbury and Van Voorhis 2009). When considering the impact of negative interactions combined with the sense of reliance women have on their supporters during reentry, tie-complexity likely functions as a salient stressor and contributes a sense of instability to women's reentry experience. Thus, in addition to tie-complexity reducing women's access to social support, I expect tie-complexity will also diminish women's mental well-being.

Factors Contributing to Tie-complexity

Past Trauma and Relationship Conflict. Incarcerated women often have extensive histories of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse and neglect perpetrated by family members and romantic partners (Browne et al. 1999; Cobbina 2010; Messina and Grella 2006; Wright et al. 2013). Likewise, justice-involved women have high rates of

relational conflict with family (25%) and partners (7%) relative to men (La Vigne 2009).

Furthermore, in general network literature, relationships with female and older relatives

are more likely to be difficult social ties to maintain (Offer and Fischer 2018). This is a

notable concern, as most women's support networks during their reentry are older female

relatives (Cobbina 2010; Shollenberger 2009; Valera et al. 2015). Supporting this, O'Brien

(2001) found the majority of recently released women in her study had highly

confrontational and abusive relationships with their mothers. Thus, the adversarial and

volatile relationships common in women's social networks likely place them at a

heightened risk of experiencing tie-complexity in their social networks compared to their

male counterparts. When considering the extensive abuse and trauma incarcerated women

may have experienced at the hands of others affiliated with members of their support

network, it is reasonable to expect women may be unwilling to request substantial support

from these members. In the event women must leverage support from emotionally

triggering network members, I hypothesize they will be more reticent to seek support and

will experience heightened emotional distress from the support they do receive.

Drug Use. Extant literature suggests women who have extensive drug use

histories will have heightened tie-complexity in their personal networks relative to

women who have not used drugs with regularity. Indeed, women involved in drug use

often have conflictual relationships and extenuated network erosion (Goodson 2018;

Leverentz 2011; Shollenberger 2009). One explanation for this relational conflict is that

frequent recidivism can make drug-addicted women an inconsistent presence in their

family's lives, which can cause tension and feelings of abandonment (Leverentz 2006a;

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Leverentz 2011). Building on this, the social connections of severe drug users are often victimized by the user through abuse and theft, which can take a notable mental toll (Bloom et al 2005; Leverentz 2006a; Western 2018). When considering the emotional and financial toll of maintaining a relationship with women who have drug use histories, I expect indegree complexity to be a common occurrence in the networks of long-time drug addicts. Inversely, the social networks of justice-involved women have a high incidence of drug abuse, meaning women in recovery may also face heightened outdegree complexity from having current drug users in their network (Goodson 2018; Jones 2008; Leverentz 2011; Willging et al. 2016).

Stigma. The mark of a criminal record operates as a salient social stigma for women leaving prison. Functioning as a master status, incarceration can socially discredit a person of their redeeming qualities, resulting in society treating those with justice involvement as sub-human (Erickson 1966; Goffman 1963; Petersilia 2003:19). Unsurprisingly, family conflict during reentry often stems from labeling and stigmatization related to women's incarceration (Österman 2022). Related, incarcerated persons who perceive more stigma in their social networks report weaker social bonds with network members (LeBel 2012). Therefore, stigma likely functions to cause conflict in women's relationships during reentry. Moreover, the stigma of justice involvement can reduce mental well-being and reentry success (Kyprianides, Easterbrook, and Cruwys 2019; Moore, Stuewig, and Tangney 2016). Thus, in addition to social network impact, experiencing social stigma from key supporters likely reduces women's mental health.

Gender dynamics may exacerbate the stigma of justice involvement experienced by women. With emphasis on purity and what is acceptable gendered behavior for women, they may face greater social censure and less tolerance from their community and social networks (Carlson 2010). According to gender theory, the accurate performance of gender in line with one's sex category[12] is a prevalent status characteristic that impacts life chances (West and Zimmerman 1987). Traits perceived to be related to criminality, such as aggression, dominance, and greed, are considered masculine, whereas the ideal-type woman is submissive, motherly, virtuous, and innocent (Connell 1987; West and Zimmerman 1987). Therefore, engaging in criminal behavior is in direct violation of feminine ideals and discredits women who engage in crime (Naffin 1985). Indeed, the United States has an extensive history of using the criminal justice system to police femininity, with 19th-century laws emphasizing "proper" behavior for women and demonizing the "wayward woman" (Carlson 2010; Coughenour 1995). Thus, it is no surprise that justice-involved women are viewed less favorably and face greater social censure for their justice involvement than men (Christian and Thomas 2009; Dodge and Pogrebin 2001; Klein and Kress 2013; Pitcan, Marwick and Boyd 2018).

While gender theory suggests incarcerated women may experience more stigma reentering the community relative to men, research has yet to examine how this stigma may differentially impact women's access to social support. Regarding social support, women whose social networks perceive their justice involvement as discrediting, in poor character, or dangerous may be less willing to provide social support and function as an

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[12] The sex people assume someone is based on their physical appearance (West and Zimmerman 1987).

indegree tie-complexity. Moreover, receiving support from connections who regularly condemn past behavior and look down on them may reduce women's mental well-being and lend to a greater hesitancy to seek further support.

Respectability Politics and Black American Culture. It is well known that Black Americans are disproportionately represented in the U.S. criminal justice system and that they experience greater collateral consequences during reentry (Carson 2021; Fader et al. 2015; Pettit and Western 2004). Indeed, the life chances of Black Americans are constrained due to their criminal records to a greater extent than justice-involved White Americans (Pager 2003; Pager, Western and Sugie 2009; Wakefield and Uggen 2010). One explanation for the diminished opportunities faced by Black Americans with a criminal record is the greater stigma attached to their justice involvement (Hirschfield and Piquero 2010; Pager 2003; Pager 2008; Rios 2011). Importantly, most of the research highlighting the heightened criminal justice stigma experienced by Black Americans frames the stigma as originating from racial bias and discrimination held by White members of society (Alexander 2010; Brown 2010; Caldwell and Caldwell 2011; Pager 2003). While racial discrimination undoubtedly accounts for a large portion of the increased stigma faced by reentering Black citizens, the role of criminal record stigma within the Black American community is largely under-studied.

In high-crime Black communities, criminal participation is often normalized, particularly for men (Anderson 2000; Pattillo 1998). Moreover, many incarcerated Black women come from justice-involved families (Christian and Thomas 2009), which may lead to the assumption there would be little stigma related to Black women's criminality.

Supporting this, studies including both men and women find that Black Americans report feeling less rejection, harassment, and attrition in their personal social networks due to their criminal record (Griffin and Evans 2021; LeBel 2012). Likewise, some researchers suggest Black Americans are more tolerant (Hirschfield and Piquero 2010), less punitive (Bobo and Johnson, 2004), and more forgiving of justice involvement than Whites (Bellamy 2006). However, research on Black American family culture suggests the opposite.

Rooted in a past of white supremacy and oppression, to combat racial stereotypes, elite Black American culture embraced stringent ideals and behavioral expectations, termed "respectability politics" (Harris 2014). Black respectability politics aim to distance Black families from disparaging elements of Black culture that are considered low status by White members of society (Duneier 1992; Ford 2015; Patillo 2007). Criminality is often innately associated with Blackness, even within Black communities (da Silva 2013; Kerrison et al. 2018; Nguyen 2015). Thus, engaging in criminality places the carefully maintained image of a respectable Black family at risk, resulting in social censure (Kerrison et al. 2018; Jefferson 2023). We see a version of respectability politics mirrored in disadvantaged Black communities, with Black families adopting strict rules and moral principles with the aim of raising "good" kids (Anderson 2000; Duneier 1992). When considering the intersection of race and gender, respectability politics place a greater emphasis on women's purity and morality (Leath and Mims 2021; Pitcan et al. 2018), suggesting justice-involved women may receive greater stigma from the Black community than their male counterparts.

A principal element of Black culture and respectability politics is the church community, with congregations functioning as an extended family and key social support providers, particularly for women (Anderson 2000; Barnes 2005; Du Bois 1903; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Taylor et al. 2005). Notably, groups often share social evaluations, meaning stigma can spread throughout social networks and effectively isolate stigmatized individuals (Carter and Feld 2004). When considering the strong link between church attendance and Black respectability (Harris 2003; Higgenbotham 1994; White 2015), it is likely that the church communities of Black women will stigmatize them during reentry. Therefore, if women consider the church community a key social support, this may function as a tie-complexity for them. Further, women's families may experience second-hand stigma from their congregation, which may also foster conflict or resentment within the family and cause tie-complexity. Taken together, Black women may have higher instances of tie-complexity in their family and community stemming from stigma anchored in Black respectability politics. Moreover, the level of social support families are willing to provide to returning women and the extent of stigma-related familial conflict is culturally dependent (Österman 2022), further suggesting tie-complexity in the networks of Black women will restrict their access to social support during reentry.

Current Study

In sum, tie-complexity is likely very common in the networks of reentering women. Moreover, when considering the variability across the extent and type of support provided by women's personal networks seen in Chapter 2, tie-complexity may be one

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mechanism behind this disparity. However, it remains to be seen the extent to which tie-complexity is present in women's networks and how these complicated interpersonal dynamics impact the ways women leverage their social network for reentry success. The following study seeks to illuminate how tie-complexity impacts women's ability to access social support through their networks. Specifically, I investigate how tie-complexity influences network member's willingness to provide support, women's reluctance to request support, and women's reentry and well-being. I further assess which factors increase the risk of women having tie-complexity in their networks.

Data and Methods

Support Network. Women's primary support network was discovered by asking, "since your release, who are the top three people you used as social supports?" Women were then asked to specify the role this tie played in their network (E.g., parent, sibling, partner, etc.).

Tie-complexity. The measure of tie-complexity is comprised of interview questions targeted at assessing tie-complexity in combination with difficulties women brought up in natural conversation. To ascertain tie-complexity, women were asked 1) What relationships challenged your reentry efforts? 2) How did these relationships challenge your reentry efforts? 3) Was there anyone you sought support from who did not give you the support you needed? 3b) Why do you think this person did not provide support when you asked? 4) Was there anyone you thought would provide support, but you did not feel comfortable asking them for help? If so, please explain why you had

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reservations. 5) Has anyone in your social network made staying crime-free and/or sober more difficult? If so, in what ways has their behavior made this difficult for you? Last, if women indicated any history of trauma or abuse during the demographic survey portion of the interview, women were asked, "How has your history of abuse with -INSERT ROLE- impacted your reentry efforts?"

Stigma in the Black Community. This study was not originally designed to explore greater stigma against justice-involved women within the Black American community. However, my second interview drew my attention to the issue by discussing at length the role Black American culture played in making her reentry more difficult. After this point, most interviews with Black women naturally discussed Black American culture without prompting. In the event women discussed stigma but did not link it to culture, they were asked if there were any cultural elements they felt contributed to their social exclusion.

Analytical Strategy. The primary focus of this chapter is the tie-complexity that occurs between women and their nominated top three supporters to assess how reliance on conflictual ties impacts women's reentry. Thus, the first theme I applied was tie-complexity among women's top three supports in their network. Within this theme, I identified sub-themes of complexity stemming from drug use, relationship conflict, trauma history, dependence, lack of understanding, and stigma. These codes were further broken out by indegree and outdegree complexity. Within the stigma code, I parsed out women's experience of stigma by racial identification, as it became clear the stigma experienced by Black women was far beyond that undergone by White women. This was

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subsequently divided into stigma women attributed to originating from their family and stigma women linked to their church community and religion. Beyond women's top three support network members, it became further evident that tie-complexity was present in women's extended networks and was a cause for women to no longer have people in their core support network. Thus, additional themes were created to assess tie-complexity in women's complete network and their network history. Within each theme, I investigate the origin of the complexity and how it impacts women's willingness to receive social support, their relation's willingness to provide social support, and how the complexity impacts women's reentry and well-being.

Results

      Tie-complexity was readily apparent in women's networks when returning to the community post-incarceration, even among women's top three networks. Indeed, 70 percent of women had at least one complex tie in their top three supports. Conversely, only two of the 20 women interviewed discussed no tie-complexity in their networks, while four experienced it in their extended social network. Notably, of the six women who did not have a complex tie in their core support network, half of them only nominated formal supports among their top three choices. This suggests tie-complexity is even greater than the 70 percent observed in exclusively informal support networks. Tie-complexity ranged from feeling close relationships were not as trusting, to having extensive abuse histories with their core supporters. Of interest, both indegree and outdegree tie-complexity in women's core network occurred most with parents,

particularly mothers. The second most common relationship at risk of tie-complexity was siblings. This was particularly likely in the event siblings took on a parenting role for the returning woman. Only one woman nominated a complex tie that was not a parent or a sibling (husband) who remained in their network. As we will see, if a tie-complexity occurred between women and non-nuclear family members or friends, the tie was often severed. The following sections will explore in-depth how different factors influence women's tie-complexity and the extent of support they receive.

Past Trauma. All but one woman who had an abuse history did not maintain their abuser in their support network. To illustrate how abuse impacted network attrition, when asked if her history of victimization by her extended family impacted her reentry, Laila (26, Black) said:

> Yes. It did. […] I had somehow ended up not to trust in my family. I thought this; that people that should be so close to me, but it's the same place that you're molested, or it's the same place that harmful acts are done on you. The same people that you really want to trust, we are supposed to trust, or the safest place you should be is the place that doesn't have that safety.

Laila felt that her history of abuse made it difficult to turn to family for substantial support, though she is trying to build back her trust in them and use them for small amounts of support. Thus, while Laila could harness her extended family for considerably more support, the tie-complexity stemming from her abuse led her to elect a formal support in her top three support network over an extended family member.

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For the one woman who maintained her abuser in her core support network, her history unexpectedly played a scant role in her willingness to ask for most forms of support from their abuser. Rather, past traumatic experiences played a notable role in her subsequent mental health after receiving support. Cammy, a 33-year-old White woman, discussed at length what an amazing support her father was during her incarceration and reentry, referring to him as her "superhero." However, as we spoke more, she began to reference an extensive physical and mental abuse history with her father. When asked how her trauma stemming from her father's behavior impacted her reentry and the social support he provided, Cammy elaborated:

> I think that my dad was traumatized growing up, he was verbally abusive because he was angry; he had a lot of anger. He would say things that still resonate with me, still trigger me. Like if I hear my boyfriend saying something, you know in that manner. It triggers me if it was something my dad used to say. He was just very mean.

Thus, Cammy struggles mentally with being regularly triggered not only in her relationship with her father, but also with her other supporters due to her father's past abuse. Though she does not feel her social support level was changed by these tie-complexity, the complexity was detrimental impact to her mental health. She did, however, allude to not being able to receive as much emotional support from her father, as she felt she could not share her triggers because "he is not that person anymore" and she didn't want to hurt her father. Therefore, the only form of support Cammy was hesitant to request from her abuser was emotional support.

Past abuse also caused outdegree tie-complexity in women's social networks when the abuse originated from a third party. Gabrielle, a 28-year-old Black woman, was sexually assaulted by her babysitter when she was a teenager, which started a legacy of hiding her problems from her parents:

> My brother and I were being assaulted. It happened three times, but I really couldn't say so to my mom. Everyone sees him as like a very good person. So, about that day and night, I just keep it to myself. What's why I say I have a lot bottled up inside.

When asked if this experience impacted her willingness to reach out for social support from her parents, Gabrielle noted she is afraid to share her true self with her parents only to find out they judge her, adding, "They would judge you. So, I don't talk to anybody. I once said (I used drugs) to my mom, but she just told me I should cut it out. 'You can't do such things.' […] So, I get very conscious these days, I feel the best thing is to bottle it up inside." Thus, though Gabrielle was not victimized by a member of her support group, her inability to share her victimization experiences with her parents made her less willing to receive emotional support from them.

In sum, I find that women typically remove past abusers from their social network. However, the abuse can still cause complexity in other relationships, due to triggers or feeling the relationship did not prevent the abuse or support them in the aftermath of abuse. In the event the abuser remained in their network, women may feel reticent to request emotional social support from them, particularly if it relates to trauma

caused by the tie. Likewise, depending on someone responsible for trauma can also be deleterious to women's mental health.

Relationship Conflict With few abusers remaining in women's core networks, relationship conflict more frequently contributed to women's tie-complexity than trauma history (85% of women reported relationship conflict-based complexity). Fayth is an upper-middle-class Black woman (age 58 at interview) who has substantial relational conflict with both of her core supporters; her husband and her brother. Fayth felt it was necessary to share her backstory to illuminate her conflict with her husband. Beginning with their early relationship, Fayth informed me:

> I was more like the bread winner of the family […] I was always busy. I
> was always going, and he was always gone because he was in the military.
> Our marriage was hurting, I would just say that, and I just felt like I
> wanted to do things right. So, I got into church, I became a Christian, and I
> decided that I would give up my career to come home to be the best wife I
> can be so I could save my marriage. I came home, and I allowed my
> husband to take care of the family life, so that he could be the head of the
> household. […] He ended up getting fired from his job […] When he told
> me he lost his job, he was making good money like he's making now, it
> put me into a PTSD spiral episode. […] I was trying to find a way to save
> everything, and I got a hold to the wrong people over the internet.

Fayth felt her mental health was extremely deteriorated at this time, but she could not turn to her husband because he was self-absorbed in his failings as a breadwinner. She

elaborated that her white-collar charge stemmed from attempting to recover the assets her husband lost, suggesting she felt he was in part accountable for her incarceration. Further compounding this conflict, while she was in prison, neither her husband nor brother visited her. Fayth's only outside communication was an occasional call with her husband. When preparing to leave prison, she was terrified she would have nothing to go back to, sharing:

> To be honest, I really didn't know what it was going to be like after I got
>
> out after four and a half years. But I can tell you this, and this is this is a
>
> true story. I really thought I wasn't gonna have a marriage anymore to be
>
> honest with you. I mean they (husband and brother) didn't come see me;
>
> my husband didn't come see me.

Now she has returned to the community, her husband avoids discussing her incarceration and ignores his lack of visitation, which Fayth felt strained their relationship. Likewise, her brother refused to let her stay with him during her parole period, which was disappointing to Fayth. This tie complexity limited the support Fayth was willing to request from her husband and brother, as she only turned to either of them for financial support.

Extended social networks also caused relational conflict with immediate social supporters. Adeline, a 28-year-old white woman, lived at home with her parents, adult brother, his wife, and his two toddlers. After her father received a workplace injury, Adeline's family was placed in a precarious financial situation, resulting in Adeline and her mother returning to work. During this time, her brother and sister-in-law remained

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unemployed. Adeline felt her brother was lazy and undeserving of her parent's support and regularly fought with him about his lack of contributions and his annoying children, which created tension in the household. This tension made it more difficult for Adeline to accept support from her parents, as she not only did not want to be an additional burden but also felt the housing support they provided her was undesirable due to the presence of her brother and his family.

Relational conflict also insighted network attrition, with Amy (45, White) and Kristin (32, White) removing ties from their top three network during their reentry when the tie-complexity became too harmful for them to maintain. Immediately after prison, both Amy and Kristin were in unhealthy romantic relationships with women they depended heavily on. Amy maintained a relationship with a woman still in prison and received substantial emotional support from her partner. In the same vein, Kristin noted having to remain in a relationship with an abusive girlfriend directly after prison to have stable housing. Both women felt the relationships were harmful to their emotional well-being and limited their ability to work on themselves as part of their reentry. Eventually, the tie-complexity of their toxic relationships and their reliance on their girlfriends grew to be too great of a disruption to their reentry, and they ended the relationships, removing the partners from their top three supporters.

In sum, current relational conflict in women's top three network members was inconsistently related to the amount of social support women were willing to receive; some women were comfortable receiving extensive support from conflicted relationships, whereas others were more reticent. The form of support most impacted by relational

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conflict was emotional support, as women did not always feel comfortable discussing the role the social tie historically and currently played in their emotional distress. The more notable impact of receiving social support from conflictive ties was women's diminished mental health, as this form of outdegree tie-complexity often made women feel the emotional strain. Relationship conflict also resulted in women removing past supporters from their support network once a tie-complexity's negative aspects surpassed the benefits. Though relationship conflict was introduced in this section, past conflict primarily manifested in the sub-themes of drug use, lack of understanding, and stigma, which will be closely examined in the following sections.

    Drug Use. Women who had extensive drug addiction in their past typically had more complicated and conflictual relationships within their social network than non-drug-using women (58% versus 25%). Amy was heavily involved with drugs for over a decade prior to her most recent incarceration. She was incarcerated many times and always turned to her parents and sister for support when returning home. In addition to relying on them every time she left prison, Amy also had a history of stealing from them to support her addiction. Therefore, though her family offered support, Amy expressed they hold indegree complexity for her. She feels that her relationship with her family was too damaged to rely on for substantial social support and that she needs to show them she can do her reentry herself to mend the relationship. Instead, she only nominated formal supports among her top three network supports. Amy also experienced outdegree complexity because she feels her family looks down on her:

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My mother was very tough love. Very 'If your life doesn't fit into this

image of what's okay in my mind, then you're not my daughter.' and I still

struggle with that to this day like our relationship still struggles because

'oh, now I'm clean, and I'm cleaned up, and I look all right. I have a nice

job, and I've got a nice car, and I'm paying my bills. Now I'm good

enough to be your daughter.' And I'm sure that's not the way she feels, but

that's the way it like translates to me. Like, when I needed you, I wasn't

good enough to be your daughter.

When speaking of her full nuclear family, Amy added, "My family doesn't know me. My

family knows the version of me that I felt comfortable sharing with them." Though Amy

cared for her family and still received minor social support from them, the tie-complexity

presents in their relationship due to the relational damage caused by her addiction and her

feelings of abandonment prevented her from fully relying on them for social support.

Six other women shared similar stories, with tie in-degree complexity occurring

due to a history of lies, theft, victimization, hurt, and abandonment of core supporters by

women during their addiction. This caused ties with close supporters to be tenuous or

fully severed, resulting in women with drug histories having greater tie complexity and

more anemic social networks, which in turn reduced their access to social support.

Contrary to expectations, women did not mention anyone in their current support

network who caused outdegree tie-complexity due to drug use. This was in large part due

to the intentional knifing off with ties who engaged in drug use or drug-using friends

having an "out of sight, out of mind mentality" and "drifting away", as Cammy describes

it. The instances of drug use in their social network were still a prevalent concern for Trisha and Amy, who both had children who regularly used drugs. Though their children were not nominated in their support network, both women experienced relationship conflict with their children and had to distance themselves to remain sober.

Of relevance, the same number of White and Black women had a drug use history in the sample (6 per group). However, Black women often had more short-term, secretive use, whereas white women had prolonged and public drug use histories. Thus, indegree tie-complexity stemming from drug use was limited to white women's experiences. As we saw in Gabrielle's story above and will see in Kiara and Laila's stories below, the efforts Black women took to obscure their addictions from their family and community often functioned as an outdegree complexity. This was because of the stress of the stigma they would experience should their drug use become common knowledge preventing them from seeking addiction-based emotional support.

They Don't Understand. Another predominant theme generating tie-complexity was social supporters not understanding women's experience of incarceration and reentry. Chapter 2 discussed how many women felt people with no justice involvement could not relate to their experiences in the same way as other incarcerated women. Building on this, six women had issues with their nuclear family not understanding their experiences, being insensitive, or treating them differently after returning home. This outdegree tie-complexity impacted the level of emotional and appraisal support they were willing to request or receive. When asked why she did not feel she could turn to her parents for emotional support, Laila noted:

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I feel my parents are so… They're so grown. They are old. So sometimes

they can't understand certain things. I could turn to them, but in rare

occasions. It could be that I feel my parents are so judgmental, and it could

be sometimes the thing I'm just getting is pity.

Laila elaborated that she felt her parents were unaccepting of behaviors they thought

were deviant, such as dating, partying, and criminal engagement, which caused notable

conflict in their relationship:

They really restricted me. Threatened me, because, you know parents, they

can't allow you to get in to engage in any kind of illegal business or any

kind of illegal activity.

She also felt that with their dated values, they were unable to sympathize with her

circumstances to the same extent as younger supporters. Laila also noted that this

complexity has subsided the longer she has demonstrated pro-social behavior to her

parents.

Conflict stemming from family not being sympathetic towards their daughters

was particularly common if women still lived with their family, as family members were

strict and overly observant of women's behaviors. Adeline describes what it is like to live

with her parents after prison:

It's stressful. They treat me like I'm 15 most of the time, and it's been a lot

[…] They started treating me differently. They've treated me differently

ever since (prison). I can't walk out the door without them being like

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"Where are you going? What are you doing?" I'm like 'oh, just leave me

alone!

In fact, all four women who lived with their parents reported substantial strain related to

parental policing of behavior under the assumption their daughters are liable to return to

crime. Kiara, a 21-year-old Black woman, had a stark example of her parents treating her

"like a murderer":

They lock their room so that's not something I'm not used to. Because

they are like, "if you could stab that girl, maybe you can do it to us too."

And I could constantly talk to them and tell them I'm not a beast, I'm not

a monster, and I wasn't. That cold treatment was... I wasn't happy. It was

very hard for me. But since I had no other option, I have to live here. Stay

how they want me to stay.

Notably, women who felt a supporter was restricting their behavior or was

unsympathetic often resented any appraisal support or advice provided by the tie,

interpreting it as a further critique of their lifestyle. Taken together, tie-complexity that

stems from an unwillingness to understand women's experience of reentry, lack of

empathy or inability to sympathize, and policing women's behavior according to personal

values resulted in women feeling less able to request social support from the tie,

particularly emotional and appraisal support.

Stigma. Women in this study were readily stigmatized by members of their

support network for having a criminal justice history, which contributed to both indegree

and outdegree tie-complexity (n=16). Regarding indegree complexity, social network

members were less willing to provide support if they perceived a criminal justice record as discrediting or embarrassing. For example, Trisha recounted that her relationship with her brother was tenuous because of how his wife treated her and her codefendant sister:

> So, my sister-in-law judges me a lot, and that's why it was so uncomfortable staying there. Because, like she's a very sophisticated woman, and I felt like she's like 'oh, my God, I got a felon in my house, and I can't have my gun here because of her, and you know just she's never gonna be anything.'

Thus, though Trisha's brother desired to support her, his wife's prejudice prevented him from providing the extent of support he wished.

Turning to the consequences of outdegree complexity stemming from stigma, women shared being more reticent to request support from people they felt held negative views of them. Amy describes why she continues to refuse social support from her parents:

> I was telling my mom about the work we did at (my work that supports women in drug recovery) and she was like, 'oh, that just makes me so, so sad that these women choose to live like this.' And like, I had to get back. I had to just get off the phone. I was just like, 'yeah, okay, I'm getting off here', because my mom doesn't realize like when she makes these little snide comments, like you're ultimately talking about your child. You don't say my name. But you're ultimately talking about me because these are the

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people that I identify with. These are the people that I relate to. I didn't

want to go back home to my parents.

Therefore, the tie-complexity women experienced due to stigma not only impacted the extent of support they received but also resulted in the removal of members from women's top support network.

Taken together, when members in or near women's core support network hold stigmatizing views of incarceration, social support is limited. This is because supporters may be less forthcoming with support, and women are more reticent to receive support from those they feel judged by. Of relevance, the examples from White women regarding stigma in their personal networks were relatively sparse; while they did experience stigma related to their incarceration and subsequent tie-complexity, it was not nearly to the same extent as Black respondents. Therefore, most stigma findings will be discussed in the following sections.

Black American Culture and Respectability Politics. Originally this study did not incorporate cultural differences in access to social support. However, my second interview (Fayth) followed up the next day to share that she felt the story she shared was incomplete since she was not asked about the role Black American culture played in her reentry. She elaborated that in her experience, no one in her Black community was understanding of her felony record or mental health issues, resulting in extreme social exclusion. She further noted that she thinks this is due to "generational stigma" that has become baked into the culture of Black Americans. Fayth's emphasis on these cultural differences provides a meaningful context to her story told in the above section. Indeed,

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she subsequently attributed all social exclusion from her husband and brother to stigma within the Black community.

When asked if she felt Black American culture impacted her reentry experience, LaTasha (47, Black) shared a similar sentiment as Fayth:

I think it's 50/50, because it's like they can identify culturally because they know the background of being Black in America, but once they do know, they look at you like a bird with a broken wing. You stand out. […] I do get a sense that it's like, 'okay, there is LaTasha, stay away from her.' Like you get the nod, 'she's done some stuff, steer clear of her.' So, in a sense it is judgement.

Gabrielle also shared she felt Black American culture was particularly judgmental of felons. She went to great lengths to avoid being perceived as a felon because of this. In fact, only her parents, siblings, and long-distance friends knew of Gabrielle's incarceration. Her young daughter, new boyfriend, distant friends, and extended family were all told she was away on a business trip during her incarceration. When asked why she maintains this lie, she said:

I feel like they wouldn't understand me. I don't want to be in a place where someone has to feel sorry for me, or where someone has to judge me. I know people ordinarily have to be judgmental, and I hate being in that situation where someone has to say, "oh you're a bad mother', or 'you did this', and I'll have to explain. So, I've had a to keep to myself. […] I just leave it behind me. I don't want to talk about it. I just move on.

Interviewer: Why do you feel like they would be very judging of your justice involvement?

Gabrielle: I don't know. It's normal to for people to be judgmental, especially of people who have been incarcerated. They might not say that they were disappointed, but they are judging and don't believe you (are innocent). Except for my mom. She knew I could not be involved in such a thing.

She subsequently clarified the group to which she referred in the previous quote was specifically her Black community, noting that she feels White people do not stigmatize their daughters to the same extent.

In sum, 73 percent of Black women interviewed felt black culture and respectability politics somehow heightened the amount of stigma they experienced from their family and community relative to white women. This reduced their access to social support and mental wellbeing. The following sections will unpack Black women's experience of stigma, highlighting Black parenting emphases on discipline, goodness, and church participation as origins of the heightened stigma experienced by Black women.

Respectability and Withheld Support. Asking respondents if there was anyone who they expected support from during their reentry that did not support them as they expected highlighted the role respectability expectations played in in-degree duality and the withholding of social support. When asked this, Kiara immediately bit out, "My family. I thought they would support me. But when I was in prison, they didn't even come

to visit me. Even out of prison, they weren't treating me right in the right way. I didn't expect them to behave in such a way." When asked why her family did not visit her in prison, Kiara felt her family held judgmental values that were reinforced by their community:

> They were judgmental. They say like, 'I've been his good kid. Then there is this (criminal) case.' So, they use it to judge me. […] They were so judgmental and harsh, and they are too religious. And they were listening to other people. How other people were saying. "So, your girl is this and your girl is that." And they started behaving like others, so I couldn't talk to them. I used to talk to my sister, but there was a time it was very hard even talking to my sister."

Kiara further discussed that her extended family and community reinforce the stigma she experiences at home, noting:

> When we go to family gatherings, they don't even want to see me talking to the kids, to my other cousins. It's bad. Now I just have to stay alone. I stay alone most of the time. I'm at my place at my parents like house like I don't like going out, because adults start judging me and I don't like it. I don't like justifying myself telling people, 'I'm not bad. You know I changed.' Like I don't like proving that I'm good to them and keep explaining to them.

Tia, only 19 years old at the time of her release, experienced the most extreme ostracization related to her incarceration stigma. Like Kiara, Tia's story was prompted by

asking who did not support her as she expected. Tia also felt her family failed her, responding:

> The fact that the only people that I knew that's sort of helped me didn't come for me. They didn't want anything to do with me. That's my family. Yeah. And that made me sad. Then I couldn't sleep many times and I had to resort to sleeping pills. Because I felt like the only people that should be on my side aren't on my side. I depend on them, and now they don't what anything to do with me. When I was inside the only person that came was my sister, and she came once. And she promised me that she'll keep in touch, but I never saw her again.

At this point, Tia's story takes a sharp divergence from Kiara's. Though Kiara had substantial tie-complexity present in her relationship with her parents, she maintained them as key supports. Tia, however, was fully abandoned by her parents:

> Before (prison), I lived with my parents. After the incident and I got jailed, and I went back (home) they had left that place. I tried looking for them and when I got them, they said they don't want anything to do with me. So, I had to leave and look for somewhere else to stay. But my elder sister took me in.
>
> Interviewer: How did that make you feel?
>
> Tia: I felt bad. I was depressed. And I was really, really depressed. I spent most of the time crying. I don't know what to say I just I was depressed. That's all I can say.

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Taken together, stigma related to violations of respectability politics resulted in Black women being treated as a social pariah by their nuclear family, which was exacerbated by extended family opinions. This primarily led to relationship tension, causing tie complexity and limiting access to social support. In some cases, this even led to erosion of social support network.

Respectability and Discipline. A common theme among Black respondents was that their parents, particularly mothers, were "strict disciplinarians" and "judgmental" (9 of 11 Black women). This made turning to parents for emotional support delicate, as though Black mothers were often idolized and considered a substantial source of emotional support by their daughters, women felt they could only receive support for topics their mother approved of. For justice-involved women, this meant much of their lives had to be withheld from their parents. Imani, a 26-year-old Black woman, described why she sold drugs to make money to escape an abusive ex instead of asking her mother for help:

> I think I didn't really have a very close relationship with my mom. So, most of the time the things I would be going through I wouldn't tell her, because I'm so scared. I was so afraid to express myself to her. My mom is very… she's a disciplinarian, so none of us cared to talk to her at the time.
> Interviewer: Do you still feel like she's a disciplinarian, now that you're an adult?
> Imani: She's okay now, I mean even though she acts spicy sometimes, she'd talk to me, kind of put me on track.

Now, Imani considers her mother a central support for all types of support, though her mother's occasional "spiciness" makes Imani motivated to be less dependent on her, as she wants to raise her daughter to feel supported and safe to confide in her about anything-away from her mother.

Gabrielle shared a similar story, noting that her mother's strictness limited what she could confide in her:

My mother, she knows literally everything. When I say everything that I mean what I want her to know she doesn't go past her boundaries.

Interviewer: What are her boundaries?

Gabrielle: She has these things she says every time I'm in trouble. She's quite religious, so she says when I'm in trouble that God reveals it to her.

Gabrielle further added that her mother's "boundaries" prevented her from sharing she was in an abusive marriage and her subsequent drug use, which made her feel she had no one to fully open up to. In fact, this interview was the first time she shared her abuse and drug use history with anyone. In sum, though Black women note very close relationships with their family, especially their mother, they often feel limited in access to emotional support because they are unable to share difficulties related to aspects of their life their family disproves of. Likewise, Black women feel more emotional distress when they fear receiving disapproval.

Goodness as Redemption. The performance of goodness was also a prevalent theme in Black women's discussion of their families. Seven Black women (64%) often felt the need to demonstrate they were "good girls" or "good mothers" by staying in at

night, limiting their social interactions, and hiding any behaviors they felt would tarnish their reputation. Women living with younger siblings, or their children were particularly pressured to be a good influence. For example, Laila struggled to live up to the expectation of being a good role model for her little brother, which caused her guilt. She noted, "they feel I'm older than him, but I fail to show him what he's supposed to do [...] I feel I'm the person who's supposed to model the behavior that I want my siblings to show. But unfortunately, I couldn't, so I blame myself a lot. Now, I'm really trying to rebuild back that so that they are able to again see a different person or a good person in me." Since prison, Laila goes out of her way to demonstrate "goodness" and be a positive influence, primarily through rarely leaving the home and her parent's supervision, unless to attend church.

The theme of goodness and being "bad" regularly came up throughout Kiara's interview as well. She first mentioned this dichotomy when I asked why her parents didn't visit her in prison, elaborating, "they were judgmental. They say like, 'I've been I've been this good kid. Then there is this case.' So, they use it to judge me." Kiara felt that to combat the perception that she was bad, she had to do substantial face-work with her family.

> Now I just have to stay alone. I stay alone most of the time. I'm at my parents' house. I don't like going out because adults start judging me and I don't like it. I don't like justifying myself telling people, 'I'm not bad. You know I changed.' Like I don't like proving that I'm good to them and keep explaining to them.

She later added, "I'm trying to work on myself. Maybe get a job. Be the good person, the good girl. But I am I'm good. I don't think I'm bad, but they think I'm bad. […] I want to prove to them that I'm not the bad child they once heard of. I'm the good child they were used to."

The pressure women felt to be "good," and the stigma they faced from their incarceration was at odds with some of the women's convictions. Gabrielle was found guilty of a theft committed by a colleague and maintains she was innocent. Similarly, Tia, a bright-eyed college student at the time, was unaware the boy she had just begun to 'talk to' brought her to a drug deal on their way to a date. Savanah was incarcerated for stealing groceries to feed the very family that now condemns her. Thus, even when women's crimes were non-existent or committed to help their families, their incarceration still resulted in substantial exclusion and stigma. When considered in conjunction with Black women's stories, this suggests that women's actual criminality may matter less in their family's eyes than the shame the family experiences from incarceration marring their coveted image of respectability.

The Black Church. Religiosity and Black church congregations exacerbated the stigma some women experienced within the Black community. Given the importance of church attendance and community for Black women (Anderson 2000; Barnes 2005; Du Bois 1903; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Taylor et al. 2005), Black women expected their church to be central to their reentry journey. For Gloria, Fayth, LaTahsa, and Imani it

was[13]. However, six (55%) Black women in this study had a different experience. Despite anticipating the church would be a key social support during reentry, the church pastors and/or congregation treated them poorly. When I asked Laila if there was there anyone who she thought would provide support, but who she didn't feel comfortable or safe asking, she responded:

Yes, our church. Our church and our church minister. I felt he could be a person to help also, but he didn't. My parents are really close to church, but unfortunately church, and several friends from church, was somehow trying to judge me for having gone to prison.

Interviewer: So, church was not really a comfortable place because of that judgment?

Laila: No. it wasn't. They feel... our church judges people too much. They think because someone was ever involved in some illegal activity, they feel that is sin, and they are sinful, and they do want to accept someone back and give them an opportunity again. It is opposite (of Christian values)! I could explain as they drink wine, and they preach water. Unfortunately, that's what is happening with church. They tend to judge someone for doing something. […] The church didn't help. The church didn't support me. I expected them to support people, but unfortunately, they weren't.

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[13] Women's positive Christian church experience seemed to be linked in part with performance of goodness and community service. All four women were heavily involved in their church communities and regularly volunteered time and resources.

Laila felt that in addition to going against the core values of Christianity, her church was

hypocritical, stating, "And no one is ever perfect in this world. We all end up like doing

something that is wrong. And who are people to judge anyone except God?" Savanah

built on this point, sharing that she felt Christianity in Black American culture is

preoccupied with purity and sinning, whereas White Christianity emphasizes redemption.

In addition to exclusion and stigmatization by their pastors and congregation, women

struggled with congregation gossip and active bullying from their church community.

This resulted in all but one of the six women stopping church attendance, with Laila only

attending because she felt it was central to signaling "goodness" and reform to her

parents.

The Church also led to tie-complexity forming between Black women and their

families. Savanah described her mother being sanctioned by the congregation for her

incarceration:

> She'll just feel them judge her. Or the way they want to talk about me
>
> when in her presence, and she wouldn't feel nice about that. […] They
>
> would give my parents like a lot of hell for having a daughter coming out
>
> of prison. […] You can just feel the judgment […] The people from
>
> church and all that I feel like they'll just judge me, and even if they will
>
> see me, they look at me different. It makes me feel uncomfortable, so I'll
>
> say I ran away.

Savanah and her mother experienced such extreme harassment from the church

community, that Savanah moved across the city to live with her sister to prevent her

mother's continued poor treatment by the congregation she valued so much. Thus, women's family receiving secondhand stigma from the church could negatively impact their relationship with their family. In addition to tie complexity stemming from women's family experiencing vicarious stigma from their church community, tie complexity between Black women and their family also arose when women stopped attending church due to poor treatment, as this was seen as a failure to perform goodness. All together, while some Black church communities operate to improve women's experience of reentry, others contribute substantially to women's network tie-complexity through sculpting family values and stigma, exclusion, and exhibiting bullying behaviors.

Consequences of Respectability for Reentry. Importantly, tie-complexity in Black women's networks stemming from stigma had long-lasting consequences on their reentry. Both Tia and Kiara held a crippling fear of being judged and treated poorly, which gave them anxiety about leaving their house and interacting with new people. Tia and Kiara felt their difficulty making new connections isolated them from the greater society, which not only impacted their mental health but made reintegration more difficult. Indeed, Kiara was so concerned about receiving negative evaluations that despite wanting a job, she had not applied for a single job since being released over a year before the interview. Though Kiara and Tia expressed being the most paralyzed by the stigma they experienced by their family and community, Imani, Gabrielle, Laila, and Savanah also felt their decisions and opportunities were constrained by the anxiety of rejection by their community.

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As mentioned previously, the stigma by Black families and community members lowered women's overall mental health and contributed to depression. Of concern, Tia suggested it also prevented her from seeking professional assistance in coping with her depression. When asked if she had received any mental health counseling, Tia responded, "Sometimes I really think of that. But I'm always holding back. Because of the fact that they may end up judging me like any other person that knew me." Thus, the stigma Tia experienced from the Black community was so great, that she was even afraid to receive emotional support from a licensed professional. While this is a single observation, Tia's case study has substantial implications for the consequences of incarceration on Black women's well-being long after time served. Gabrielle also shared a similar sentiment, as she refused to receive formal support out of fear the community would learn she had a criminal record.

Despite the substantial complexity Black women noted in their core support network stemming from stigma and respectability politics, Black women held their nuclear family in very high regard. Thus, not only were they more likely to have tie-complexity in their networks, but the complexity they experienced was on more extreme ends of the positive and negative attribute spectrum. Indeed, Gabrielle felt her mother was so central to her reentry success that she nominated her mother twice in her top three, despite her reservations about sharing much of her life. Similarly, Imani's mother singlehandedly supported Imani in starting a business and with childcare, yet holds such strict moral values Imani turned to selling drugs before asking her mother for assistance in leaving an abusive partner. Laila also feels her parents are her biggest supporters, but

like Gabrielle and Imani, she felt they were highly judgmental, which made her unwilling to confide in them.

Though White women had tie-complexity present in their networks, they had a much lower tolerance for the amount of relationship conflict they would accept before severing the tie. Thus, where Black women clung to their familial bonds no matter how poorly they were treated, White women would move on to new supporters or turn to formal support, effectively reducing their tie-complexity. With this knowledge, it is unsurprising Black women reported far higher rates of depression, social anxiety, and hopelessness. In sum, with greater tie-complexity in their top support networks, Black women not only have more limited access to informal social support; they also experience worse mental health as a result. This is compounded by their reluctance to receive emotional support, even from formal, professional avenues.

Women discussed in this section had a wide range of familial socioeconomic status and familial justice involvement. Two women had African immigrant parents (Tia and Kiara), and the rest had Black American parents. Women in this theme also spanned all three life stages. Thus, the role of respectability politics in heightening the stigma experienced by Black women during reentry has been demonstrated to be consistent across Black women from varied family backgrounds and generations.

Discussion

For women returning home from prison, their personal social networks are one of the few resources women can rely on to ease their reentry experience (Cobbina 2010;

Goodson et al. 2018; Shollenberger 2009; Valera et al. 2017). Though Chapter 2 identified whom women commonly lean on to aid their post-prison reentry, the question remains as to why women reported varying levels of support from network members in similar roles. By adopting a lens of relational tension, this chapter seeks to understand this deficit in the literature. Specifically, I examine how negative elements of relationships impact the level of support a tie provides and/or the level of aid a woman is willing to request (tie-complexity). In addition to social support access, I further explore if the presence of tie-complexity in a women's support network negatively impacts their mental health. Last, I demonstrate that in the event the negative elements of a relationship outweigh the support women receive, the tie may eventually be severed and removed from women's reentry support network.

The social networks of reentering women had significant levels of tie-complexity among women and their top supporters. Seventy percent of women had some extent of tie-complexity among their top three support network members, ranging from feeling close relationships were not as trusting, to having extensive abuse histories with their core supporters. Tie-complexity impacted women's access to social support through two mechanisms; indegree and outdegree complexity.[14] Indegree-tie-complexity typically stemmed from a history of relationship conflict, relationship barriers caused by drug addiction, and stigmatizing views of justice involvement. Regarding social support, indegree complexity not only made social network members less willing to provide the

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[14] Recall indegree complexity stems from negative attributes of the relationship perceived by the supporter, whereas outdegree is comprised of negative attributes of the relationship perceived by the returning woman.

same extent of social support as those who did not hold negative attitudes, but it also resulted in poorer treatment of the woman they were supporting.

On the flip side, outdegree complexity was often rooted in past relationship conflict or abuse from supporters, supporters not understanding or being sympathetic, supporters withholding support, and supporters treating women differently or with stigma after their justice involvement. Of note, core supporter's demonstration of indegree complexity often led to outdegree complexity as well. As expected, women were less willing to request support from people whom they perceived as an outdegree complexity. While women were more willing to accept financial-based resource support regardless of complexity, emotional, informational, and appraisal support from these connections was avoided, with emotional support being the most often refused. Importantly, receiving support from an outdegree tie was detrimental to women's mental health, with women citing traumatic triggers, anxiety, depression, and hopelessness depending on a tie they felt was conflictual. This was particularly robust for women who lived with and were fully dependent on the tie for their wellbeing.

Past work suggests that ties with female family members and older relations are more likely to have relationship conflict, with previously incarcerated women having especially volatile relationships with their mothers (O'Brien 2001; Offer and Fischer 2018). Consistent with these studies, I find that tie-complexity primarily occurs between women and their parents, with mothers being the most common aggressor. Siblings were the other prevalent tie that was regularly complex. Women also shared past tie-complexity, where the negative aspects of a relationship outweighed the positive,

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resulting in the tie being terminated from women's core support networks. This was most common with non-nuclear families. Considering these findings in conjunction with Chapter 2, tie-complexity likely occurs across all social roles in women's support networks, yet women's relationships with their nuclear family are more durable and likely to be maintained despite tie-complexity, whereas others are not.

The distribution of tie-complexity was not equal across races, with Black women experiencing substantially more tie-complexity in their support networks than White women. Though Black women often placed greater emphasis on the extent of support they received from their families and held them in high esteem, Black women also experienced more extreme negative elements in their relationships. The key differences in women's experience by race boiled down to the stigma of incarceration and Black respectability politics. In line with respectability ideals (Harris 2014; Kerrison et al. 2018; Jefferson 2023), Black women in this sample expressed that the values held by their family and community made their support networks especially judgmental of justice involvement, as it violated their perception of what a "good daughter" should be and served to discredit the family in the eyes of their community.

Over half of the Black Women interviewed noted that Black religious communities (Christian, Catholic, and Islamic) often exacerbated women's poor treatment by their families by shaming their parents for failing to raise a respectable daughter. In most of these women's cases, they had expected their church to be an important support in their reentry journey, yet counter to their expectations, the church shamed or bullied the women themselves, until they stopped attending.

In sum, the emphasis on respectability in Black American families places Black women at a greater disadvantage on reentry, as they feel less able to request social support from a family and community that highly stigmatizes them. Additionally, they face greater mental health consequences, as the constant condemnation by their family and larger community raises depression and hopelessness. Moreover, Black women are particularly resistant to requesting emotional support out of fear of judgment, even from professional providers. Thus, they are faced with worse mental well-being yet have fewer coping resources.

To sum up, this chapter adds nuanced insight into our understanding of women's access to social support during their return from prison. By challenging the assumption that women's social supporters serve exclusively as a positive impact on women's reentry, we are better able to understand why some women receive more social support than others. Moreover, this chapter further identifies the additional mental health determinants of receiving support from a relationship that also has some form of conflict, suggesting the women who have the least access to social support are the ones who need it the most. Last, I highlight that these issues are particularly common among Black women, placing them in the most vulnerable positions during post-incarceration reentry.

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Chapter 4. Life Stage, Re-entry Needs, and Varied Social Networks

Criminological theory is rooted in the notion that criminal desistance and successful re-entry following incarceration varies across the life course (Giordano et al. 2002; Kim and Bushway 2018; Laub and Sampson 1993; Moffit 1993). Indeed, across time and place researchers have routinely demonstrated that criminal participation peaks in late adolescence and emerging adulthood, then tapers off in mid-to-late-twenties (Gottfredson and Hirschi 2019). Many scholars attribute the link between diminished criminal engagement and age to the difference in life stage, suggesting that with age comes additional social controls and more restrictions that diminish criminal participation (Gottfredson and Hirschi 2019; Laub and Sampson 1993). Others argue that crime peaks among teens and younger adults because cognitive maturity and impulse control have yet to fully develop at this age (Chung, Little and Steinberg 2005; Glick and Sturgeon 1998; Moffit 1993). Despite extensive work implicating the importance of life stages and cognitive development in desisting from crime, little attention has been given to how maturity interacts with experience of re-entry and collateral consequences, particularly in a female population.

Life course theories emphasize the importance of life stage as it interacts with family and social bonds in influencing reentry success. According to these theories, social bonds and family structure vary across life stages (Giordano et al. 2002;

Gottfredson and Hirschi 2019; Laub and Sampson 1993). Indeed, as people age their social networks progress from relying predominantly on family, to friends, then romantic partners, and eventually on children or formal support (Arnett 2015; Glick and Sturgeon 1998). Regarding criminality, transitions in social networks related to life stage, such as marriage, motherhood, employment, higher education, and military participation, promote successful reentry (Giordano et al. 2002; Laub and Sampson 1993;2003). Moreover, chapter two concluded that the type of social ties (E.g., parent, sibling, extended family, romantic partner, close friend, or loose tie) women have in their network influence the forms and extent of social support women's informal networks provide. Given the composition of women's networks are inherently linked to their life stage, chapter two suggests women at different life stages will have access to a varying variety and volume of social support.

In this chapter, I break out women's reentry experience across three distinct life stages: emerging adult, mid-adult, and mature adult. Particular attention is given to which re-entry barriers are unique to each group and the needs of women at different life stages. I further assess how the life stage impacts women's social network composition and their receipt of social support. Findings suggest women at alternate life stages have substantially different barriers to their successful reentry. Moreover, with women relying on different types of social relationships for support during their reentry across age, life stage also influences the extent and variety of social support women can leverage to aid in their return from prison.

Background

Extant literature suggests a variety of life-stage-based factors will influence women's reentry experience. Namely, women's barriers to reentry and the extent of social support available to them likely depend on whether a woman is an emerging, mid, or mature adult. Across life stages, women often have different skills, goals, and relationships- all of which will differentially impact their reentry experience. In a stage of extended adolescence, emerging adult women are typically childfree, dependent on others, single or in non-serious relationships, have little life experience, and are still developing cognitively (Arnett 2015; Chung, Little and Steinberg 2005; Glick and Sturgeon 1998). Middle-life women are more established, often having children and a serious romantic partner, can function independently, and are actively pursuing life goals through higher education and emphasizing their careers (Glick and Sturgeon 1998). Due to their age, mature adult women already have extensive life experience that should smooth their reentry process. Yet, they are faced with substantial reentry challenges related to older age and long periods of incarceration, including physical health issues, prisonization, and dated workplace and technological skills (Colibaba et al. 2023; Martin 2018; Stojkovic 2007; Valera et al. 2017; Williams and Abraldes 2007). In sum, when considering the notable differences in positionality and development across the life course, it is apparent that emerging, middle, and mature-life women will not experience re-entry similarly.

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Emerging Adults. Women in emerging adulthood likely have very different re-entry experiences compared to more mature women. For the general population, extended adolescence (ages 18-25) is a time of major transition where budding adults are trying to establish their identity, personal values, and independence (Arnette 2015; Beal and Crockett 2016; Glick and Sturgeon 1998). At the start of their adult lives, young adults must set themselves up in the world regarding education, institutional knowledge, employment, housing, and romantic relationships (Arnett 2015; Chung et al. 2005; Glick and Sturgeon 1998). However, this pivotal developmental stage is put on pause for women incarcerated as emerging adults, as the pains of imprisonment leave little room for development (Crewe 2011; Sykes 1958). Thus, with ambiguity in their personal identity and scant life experience, when it comes time for their reentry, women in this life stage may lack a clear direction or goals for their future. Having a roadmap toward a future conforming self is protective of recidivism (Giordano et al. 2002) and the formation of future goals (Beal and Crockett 2016), suggesting prison interfering with the completion of emerging adolescence may be particularly detrimental to reentry success.

As noted above, learning independence is a core tenant of this life stage. Young adults are heavily reliant on others, primarily parents, to meet their needs (Glick and Sturgeon 1998). For young adults in the community, emerging adulthood is the time to learn needed life skills such as cleaning, cooking, paying bills, time management, doing laundry, booking appointments, and other necessities of independent living. By living independently for the first time, young adults can learn to thrive without the support of their parents. Importantly, emerging adult women are likely to have lived with their

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parents or guardians prior to incarceration (Saar et al. 2015). Thus, young women go directly from a dependent living situation into the highly controlled prison environment where they have little agency or opportunity to learn the life skills needed to function independently (Crewe 2011; Sykes 1958). Taken together, having not lived independently until their release, younger women may need more hands-on support to facilitate a smooth reentry and teach them how to function as an independent adult.

The disjunction between legal adulthood and functional independence may further strain reentry. In his landmark theory of human development, Arnett (2000) identifies "relative independence," suggesting young adults have more independence legally and socially afforded to them than children but are not yet fully independent adults (Arnett 2000). Altschuler and Brash (2004) contend that young adults constantly strive to prove themselves as independent adults in the final stage of adolescent maturation. However, lacking many of the life skills needed to meet the demands of adulthood can cause strain in this population (Altschuler and Brash 2004, Moffit 1993; Agnew 2001). Given incarceration restricts emerging adult women from the opportunities needed to complete this life stage, women may be held in this period of extended adolescence longer than their non-incarcerated cohort, thus magnifying the strain felt. Supporting this, young adults who enter the justice system are typically less progressed on adult status markers such as educational and occupational attainment (Uggen and Wakefield 2005) and are developmentally less advanced relative to their non-delinquent peers (Chung et al. 2005; Moffit 1993). In sum, women's halted maturation process during incarceration may result

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in substantial emotional strain during their reentry, which may compound the other reentry burdens they experience.

Young adult women not only have reduced opportunities to learn social maturity; they also have yet to fully develop cognitively (Chung et al. 2005; Glick and Sturgeon 1998). Indeed, a cornerstone of life-course theory posits that young adults' heightened impulsivity, inability to delay gratification, and poor emotional regulation are key components impacting their greater criminal engagement (Gottfredson and Hirschi 2019; Moffit 1993). Without the developed social, emotional, and coping skills that stem from adult socialization, justice-involved young women may be less able to regulate their emotional reactions (Gottfredson and Hirschi 2019; Moffit 1993). Therefore, younger women may struggle more with impulsivity and anger management during their reentry than their older counterparts, which may impact their social network formation and access to social support, as well as raise the risk of recidivism.

Turning to the social networks of emerging adults, past reentry and life-stage research suggest that young women will rely heavily on their nuclear family. Young women predominantly live with their parents prior to incarceration and thus depend on them as they develop the skills to live independently (Saar et al. 2015; Glick and Sturgeon 1998). Thus, not having the opportunity to live independently prior to prison, I expect young adult women to remain heavily reliant on parents, particularly for instrumental support and learning life skills needed for independent living. Supporting this, familial support during reentry is especially important for emerging adults' desistance (Huebner and Pleggenkuhle 2015; Uggen and Wakefield 2005). Though

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research has yet to examine the role of siblings in supporting emerging adults, chapter two suggests siblings fill many of the same needs as parents, making them also important to emerging adult women during reentry.

Conversely, adolescent development research suggests at this life stage that friends and romantic partners become more salient than family members (Glick and Sturgeon 1998). However, emerging adults' emphasis on the importance of friends and partners in their social network tends to center on making good impressions and receiving positive appraisals rather than relying on them for the provision of social support (Glick and Sturgeon 1998). Moreover, friends and partners are likely in the same age group, meaning they may also lack the skills, emotional intelligence, and resources to provide substantial support (Glick and Sturgeon 1998; Huffman and Torres 2002). Therefore, while friends and partners are considered important in emerging adult networks, I expect they will not be as important in young women's support networks during reentry. Reisig and colleagues' (2002) research supports this notion, finding younger women's networks often provide less social support. Likewise, during reentry family has been found to be more supportive than friends (Cobbina, Huebner, and Berg 2012). Of concern, women in this age group have underdeveloped interpersonal skills, meaning they are less able to have effective, conflict-free interactions (Altschuler and Brash 2004; Glick and Sturgeon 1998). Therefore, emerging adult women may have reduced ability to prevent social network erosion, particularly among loose ties such as those characterizing friendships. Likewise, younger women may also struggle more to build new social networks after reentry due to weaker social skills. In all, friends may not be able to provide support to

emerging adult women during reentry; they may also be less likely to be in young women's social networks in general.

Mid-Adults. Having had more time to develop life skills, build workplace skills, and pursue advanced education, mid-adult women are likely more prepared to meet the demands of reentry than emerging adult women. Indeed, higher education and previous work experience increase odds of not only gaining employment, but also receiving higher pay after incarceration (Duwe and Clark 2017). Further, ranging from advanced bureaucratic skills such as finding employment, safe living spaces, childcare, reliable transportation, and healthcare, to budgeting, establishing credit, and building prosocial connections with others (Bohmert 2016; Glick and Sturgeon 1998; Mallik-Kane and Visher 2008), mid-adult women have notably more experience than younger women to draw upon. Taken together, mid-adult women are likely better positioned skill-wise to tackle the various barriers inherent in reentry.

Living as independent adults, life circumstances in mid-adulthood place an emphasis on establishing landmarks of adulthood, including building careers, independent living, savings, quality of life, education, romantic relationships, and motherhood (Culatta and Clay-Warner 2021; George 1993). Furthermore, while emerging adulthood is characterized by dependence on parents, mid-adult women are expected to be fully independent (Glick and Sturgeon 1998). However, while mid-adult women may be more prepared to meet the expectations of adulthood than emerging adults, expended periods of incarceration combined with collateral consequences often mean previously incarcerated women are not as established in their education, careers,

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financial independence, housing, and interpersonal relationships than the rest of their age-cohort (Kirk and Wakefield 2018). This is problematic, as there is considerable pressure to establish signifiers of adulthood during this life stage (Arnette 2015; Neugarten, More, and Lowe 1965; Settersten and Mayer 1997). Missing cultural deadlines for life achievements can result in social censure (Settersten and Hagestad 1996, Neugarten et al. 1965), and the inability to meet personal and external expectations of adulthood can negatively impact mental health and heighten feelings of failure (Culatta and Clay-Warner 2021; Mossakowski 2011; Stets and Burke 2014). Therefore, mid-adulthood may serve as a double-edged-sword during reentry; on one hand, mid-life women may be more prepared to function as adults in society, yet on the other hand, these skills may place increased pressure on mid-adult women, which can in turn cause additional strain.

Another important facet of mid-adulthood is the experience of motherhood. For many incarcerated women, motherhood is considered one of the most salient aspects of their lives (Belknap 2007; Brown and Bloom 2009; Gobena et al. 2022), with over 50% of incarcerated women having minor children (La Vigne 2009). Reuniting with children and reestablishing mothering identities is often a primary focus of women recently released (Crew, Hulley and Wright 2017; Ferraro and Moe 2003; Gobena et al. 2022). Many scholars argue that living with children can serve as the impetus for women's desistance, as previously incarcerated women often cite reuniting with their children as a key motivator for changing their behaviors (Giordano et al. 2002; Parsons and Warner-Robbins 2002).

Though motherhood can be protective of reentry, barriers to reentry, such as employment, housing, parole requirements, and eroded social networks may make mothering and reunification incredibly difficult (McKendy and Ricciardelli 2021). Moreover, research investigating released women actively caretaking for their children finds that parental stress and the additional time and financial burden may increase the risk of recidivism, particularly if the woman is the sole provider (Arditti and Few 2006; Bonta, Pang, and Wallace-Capretta 1995; Ferraro and Moe 2003; Huebner and Pleggenkuhle 2015). Indeed, young children are emotionally and financially dependent on their mothers, which can make finding the time to work and care for children nearly impossible without childcare support (Arditti and Few 2006; Berman 2005; O'Brien 2001). Further, landlords in impoverished neighborhoods may actively discriminate against applicants with children, requiring additional security deposits or actively rejecting the applications of mothers (Desmond 2016).

Beyond reentry barriers making motherhood more difficult, motherhood can also heighten women's relationship strain. While it is assumed that reunification with children is protective against recidivism (Alarid et al. 2000; Giordano et al. 2002; Parsons and Warner-Robbins 2002), weak or strained ties with children may increase risk of recidivism (Huebner, Dejong, and Cobbina 2010; Michalsen 2011; Österman 2022; Slocum, Simpson, and Et Smith 2005). With intersecting disadvantages and collateral consequences of reentry, women may not feel they live up to their maternal ideals, which can also cause strain (Brown and Bloom 2009). Likewise, around a third of incarcerated mothers were not primary caregivers at the time of incarceration (James and Glaze 2007)

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and it can be difficult to maintain custody while incarcerated (Opsal and Foley 2013).

Thus, regaining custody can also tax women's emotional well-being and consume

substantial time, which can impede women's reentry (Golden, 2005). Compounding this,

a custody battle can breed animosity throughout women's social networks, which may

further cause strain and impact women's access to social support (Bloom and Bloom

2009). Therefore, while there are benefits of having children for women's reentry, mid-

adult women may also be faced with more barriers to their reentry as they manage

motherhood in addition to the pains of reentry.

Regarding mid-life women's social support networks, children are often

considered a key source of support in women's reentry (Reisig et al. 2002; Valera et al.

2015). However, the child's age likely impacts the type and quality of support women

can pull from them, as adult children provide substantially more support than young

children (La Vigne et al. 2009). Mid-adult women are characterized by having young

children, suggesting children may play less of an active role in supporting their mothers

at this life stage, functioning primarily as sources of quality time and validation (Reisig et

al. 2002; Valera et al. 2015). Lack of childcare can be prohibitive to seeking and holding

employment, given childcare is one of the least common forms of reentry service

programing available to women (Cobbina 2010; Scroggins and Malley 2010).

Unsurprisingly, women are heavily reliant on their families to care for their children

while incarcerated and during their reentry (Bloom and Bloom 2009; Cobbina 2010;

Valera et al 2015). Having social support for help with parenting can reduce mother's

barriers to reentry (Gobena et al. 2022). Thus, familial and partner instrumental support in the form of childcare is likely of particular importance to middle-life women.

Women at this life stage are also more independent from their family, suggesting their social networks may rely more heavily on intimate partners and friends than emerging adult women (Glick and Sturgeon 1998). Studies assessing women's social networks during reentry find romantic partners only comprise approximately 6-12% of people women nominate as most supportive during reentry (Clone and DeHart 2014; Goodson 2018; Goodson-Miller 2022). However, these studies do not differentiate among the proportion of social ties by life stage. Given the emphasis on children and relationship formation in mid-life, I expect mid-adult women are significantly more likely to consider their partner a key support than young women who are typically starting new relationships and older women who have been removed from the dating pool for decades. With more established social skills, mid-adult women may also be more adept at forming and maintaining friendships (Glick and Sturgeon 1998). Relationship-building skills are especially important, as network attrition during incarceration can leave women with limited social networks if they don't create new ties (Rengifo and DeWitt 2019). Further, often with longer periods of incarceration than emerging adult women, middle-adult women have had more time to form close bonds with other incarcerated women, who were shown in chapter two to provide substantial support. In all, I hypothesize that middle adult women will depend more on close friends and romantic partners than women in other life stages.

Mature Adults. Being in the mature stage of life has benefits, including more time to build social skills, more life experience to draw upon, and a more established identity. Despite the benefits stemming from greater life experience, mature women may face the most difficult reentry context. Aside from the rare person who begins crime in later life (Hirschi and Gottfredson 2019), a consequence of being released from prison as a mature adult is often having received a long prison sentence or experiencing multiple periods of incarceration. Thus, mature women are often exposed to prison far more than women in earlier life-stages. Notably, prison is characterized by institutionalized deprivations, including a loss of autonomy, poor living conditions, dehumanizing circumstances, and isolation (Sykes 1958). Prolonged exposure to the routines, culture, and restrictions of prison can lead to a shift in habitus toward prison behavior, or "prisonization" (Clemmer 1940; Irwin and Owen 2005; Martin 2018; McKendy and Ricciardelli 2021). Prisonization can make the transition back to the community especially shocking, resulting in heightened stress and anxiety during reentry (Durnescu 2019; Martin 2018; Shantz and Frigon, 2009). Moreover, heightened prisonization can also make it more difficult for mature women to follow community social norms, further hindering their reintegration (Caputo-Levine, 2013; Durnescu 2019; Martin 2018). In all, after prolonged exposure to the controlling environment and culture of prison, mature women may have more difficulty acclimating to the transition from prison to community.

Beyond the consequences of prisonization, prolonged removal from society can also have notable impacts on returning citizens. Technology, culture, and population density has rapidly shifted in recent decades, resulting in a far different world than

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existed at the time of many mature women's incarceration. Catching up to a still-evolving society can be difficult, leaving many older returning citizens with overstimulation, decision paralysis, and anxiety (Stojkovic 2007; Western et al. 2015; Western 2018). Compounding this, women re-entering after long periods of incarceration suffer from issues stemming from prolonged leave, including absence from the labor market, dated job skills, and accrued legal debt (Denver, Pickett, and Bushway 2017; Harris 2016; Ramakers et al. 2014; Western 2002). Related, as much of the workplace technology has likely changed during their prison tenure, mature women with long sentences may have fewer employment-based skills than the general population (Western 2018). Moreover, with an increased reliance on the internet in a post-COVID-19 society, the shifts in society and technology likely have a more robust impact than before, particularly in the context of job-seeking and employment (Western and Sirois 2019).

Mature women also face additional challenges related to their age, including agism, mobility issues, and health concerns (Stojkovic 2007). Notably, older populations leaving prison also face greater stigma from community stakeholders, further impairing their reentry (Colibaba et al. 2023). Predominantly, older people leaving prison have more severe offences or longer justice involvement histories which are viewed with greater stigma (Denver et al. 2017). Amplifying the stigma experienced from community actors such as employers or landlords, mature adults are more likely to be perceived as burdensome and less capable of learning new skills due to their age (Maschi et al. 2013; McNamara et al. 2016; Stojkovic 2007). Thus, stigma may limit later-life women's opportunities more than women in earlier life stages.

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Physical disabilities and chronic health issues play a veritable role in mature women's re-entry success, particularly those with a drug abuse history (Cantora 2015; Colibaba et al. 2023; La Vigne 2009; Western 2018). Indeed, longer periods of incarceration and drug use can accelerate aging and are linked with worse mental and physical health outcomes (Reimer 2008; Stojkovic 2007; Williams and Abraldes 2007). Likewise, mature women often cope with anxiety, depression, dementia, respiratory problems, diabetes, arthritis, STDs, and cardiovascular disease at greater rates than younger women (Hayes et al., 2012; Higgins and Severson 2009; Kouyoumdjian et al. 2016; Maschi et al. 2012; Redmond et al., 2020; Yorston and Taylor 2006). Of concern, it can be particularly difficult for older returning citizens to access appropriate medical care (Hayes et al., 2012; Higgins and Severson 2009; Stojkovic 2007), and untreated medical issues or disabilities can negatively impact employability (Cantora 2015; La Vigne 2009; Visher Debus-Sherril and Yahner 2011). Thus, mature women's diminished health puts them at a greater disadvantage in post-prison reentry (Shantz and Frigon 2009).

As established in chapter two, informal social support is pivotal for overcoming reentry barriers. Yet, older populations are less likely to have access to informal social support during release (Stojkovic, 2007; Valera et al. 2017; Wyse 2016). Mature women with long-term justice involvement often suffer from eroded family and support networks. Time incarcerated, length of criminal history, and offense type erode women's informal support networks (Colibaba et al. 2023; Weill 2016). With women's prisons located in remote places, family and friends may not be able to consistently visit, particularly over a long period of incarceration (Christian 2005). Further, as noted in

chapter two, many social connections lose contact with incarcerated women over time due to volatile relationships, disinterest, and stigma, with this being most true for women with prolonged justice involvement (Shantz and Frigon 2009). Older women are at particular risk of network erosion during incarceration as they are also viewed as an additional burden due to their age and health concerns (Stojkovic 2007). Moreover, the longer women spend in prison, the more likely members of their core social networks will have passed away by the time of their release (Valera et al. 2017). Similarly, extensive recidivism and drug abuse histories can cause conflict or sever women's relationships (Huebner and Pleggenkuhle 2015; Leverentz 2006; Western 2018).

Though mature women likely have fewer sources of informal social support available to them, one type of social relationship may be more prevalent in their support networks: their children. As mature women have older adult children, their offspring are more likely to provide social support than women with younger kids (La Vigne et al. 2009). Adult decedents are not only more likely to have the means to support their mothers with financial and housing assistance, but their maturity also enables them to provide emotional support (Thoits 1995). Alternately, adult children may be estranged or still be heavily dependent upon them, as having an incarcerated mother raises the risk of their children's justice involvement and drug use, and can damage relationships (Petersson et al. 2021; Wakefield and Wildeman 2013). Taken together, depending on their relationship with their adult children, offspring may be a crucial source of social support for mature women or may function to make their reentry more difficult.

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Due to their extenuated informal network erosion, mature women may be more likely to need formal support during their reentry than women in earlier life stages (Valera et al. 2017). Yet, some work has suggested it may be more difficult for mature adults to access reentry programming, due to their higher need level (Colibaba et al. 2023; Stojkovic 2007). Research is needed to specifically assess the extent of mature women's reliance on and access to reentry programs. Recall that Chapter Two found building social capital with other incarcerated women and program officials increased women's likelihood of accessing reentry programming. Notably, women incarcerated for longer periods of time and older women are more likely to be integrated within prisons and have greater institutional knowledge (Kreager et al. 2017), suggesting they may be better positioned to build connections needed to secure formal reentry assistance.

The Current Study

Cognitive development, life course, and geriatric theories suggest women's reentry experiences and social support will vary substantially across life stages. However, research has yet to qualitatively assess the unique barriers faced by women in different life stages and how they cope with these hurdles. To fill this gap, this chapter breaks out women's impediments to reentry across emerging adulthood, middle adulthood, and mature adulthood. This chapter further investigates how women's social network composition varies across life stages and how this may impact the type and extent of social support women receive.

Data and Methods

Life stage has been argued above to be based on numerous factors, including age, maturity, parental status, independence, life skills, and much more. Thus, in addition to age, factors such as motherhood, age of child, independence, life-skills, relationship status, career achievement, health, and respondent comments (E.g., "I'm still a baby", "I am mature for my age", "I'm a grown woman.") were also used to categorize respondents. Emerging adults (n=6) typically were not mothers, were 26 or younger, relied heavily on their parents, were primarily single, employed in entry-level jobs or unemployed, and expressed the need for better social and life skills. Women who fell into the mid-adult category (n=8) were between the ages of 26-38, had young children, were in relationships, focused on building a career, lived independently, and were future-planning oriented. Last, later-life women (n=6) in the sample were between 45-73 years old, had adult children, considered themselves mature, felt their identities were fully established, and often had health issues.

Notably, life stage is a process full of transitionary periods. Two women were on the cusp of emerging adulthood and middle life. Carmen is a 25-year-old Latina working in an entry-level food service job who discussed feeling she did not have the life skills to function independently and lacked the social skills to build meaningful relationships. Though she identified herself as being a young adult, she also has a 10-year-old daughter whose life she would like to be more involved in. Her efforts to become a better mother suggest she has begun to transition out of the early-life stage. Likewise, Adeline is 28 years old and considers herself fully independent, has been divorced, and had started a

career prior to her incarceration. However, Adeline struggles with her mental and physical health, leading her to move in with her parents, as her mom helps her manage her anxiety and schedule appointments. Adeline also does not like to have in-person social interactions, finding them too triggering for her anxiety. Taken together, though Adeline has mostly transitioned into mid-life, her dependence on her parents indicates she has yet to complete this transition.

Another example of the liminal nature of life stage, Amy is a 45-year-old White woman with an extensive drug use history. With an adult child, one might first assume she falls into the later-life group. However, she identified her drug use as prohibitive to her maturity, going as far to say, "my emotional and mental age doesn't correlate with my body's age. Like, I might be 19 emotionally at this point." Amy has been living independently, has an adult child, and is working in her desired profession, making her most closely aligned with the later-life stage, yet she herself identifies feeling overwhelmed with life and social skills, feels her maturity is far behind her peers, and considers herself an emerging adult. She also has substantial mid-adult attributes, as she has another non-adult child and is currently furthering her education. Thus, these three women in transitionary phases will primarily be discussed in their most representative life stage but may also be mentioned in the discussion of women from a life stage they partially represent.

Results

Emerging Adult Reentry Experiences

Future Goals. Incarceration at a young age had a substantial impact on emerging

adult women's desired life trajectory, ability to live independently, social skills, and

personal networks. Beginning with future goals, all but one[15] young women expressed

feeling unsure about what to do with their life beyond gaining independence. After being

asked what her future goals were, Kiara, a 21-year-old black woman, noted, "I'm not even

sure what I want. I'm trying to be first stable. I'll look for a job for some time. Then, after

that I'll know what comes next."

Both Laila (26, Black) and Tia (20, Black) shared a similar sentiment, discussing

how they needed to learn independence and find a job, but lacked further direction

beyond this point. Despite having this first step to independence thought out, all three

were unemployed because they had avoided applying to formal, full-time positions. They

expressed this was due to high anxiety about rejection and feeling like the stigma of their

record will prevent them from being employed. Thus, though they felt a job was the next

step, they did not actually pursue employment, nor did they have specific career goals..

Savanah, a 23-year-old Black woman, aspired to a career, having thought more

about her future goals than the other three, yet she had no clear plan for how to attain her

goals:

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[15] The only emerging adult woman who identified a clear direction and goals was Carmen, who as noted
earlier is a mother and partially transitioned into mid-adulthood.

First, I will find work, and to save up some money to move out from my

sister's house […] and then not to be involved in any other criminal

activities. And then I would love to go to college and maybe study

something in the arts, maybe like fashion, something. What else? Just to

be financially stable and not to be so dependent on my parents.

Therefore, while Savanah had more clear career objectives, like the other three women

she was still stuck in the "find a job" phase. Like the others, she had difficulty

overcoming the fear of rejection due to felony stigma and was reticent to apply to formal

positions. She did however have a part time job for a family friend.

When asked what challenges she felt were especially difficult during reentry,

Theresa, a 24-year-old White woman, noted this lack of direction made reentry

particularly stressful:

I guess just getting used to stuff, that was my challenge, and learning what

to do with life, like what I had to do […] I would say that its hard, really

when you come home everything's different. You have to restart your

whole life […] Especially coming home to nothing, my general experience

is, it's hard, and you just can't give up.

Unlike the other emerging adult women, Theresa was quickly connected with reentry

programming that helped place her in a job. This played a clear role in her future

planning, as now she has been in the community for two years, she has a successful

career.

When synthesizing emerging adult women's experience with ambiguity in life direction, it becomes clear that employment becomes the hang-up for these women in progressing to more complex future planning. In the event employment is achieved, they feel able to move on to more involved life and career goals. However, two-thirds of emerging adult women remained stuck at the initial hurdle of beginning to apply for jobs, due to their fear of rejection stemming from their criminal record. Importantly, most emerging adult women identified not having clear future goals or steps to independence as detrimental to their mental health, particularly regarding stress, anxiety, and depression. In the grander scheme of reentry, lack of direction can also place young women at a greater risk of recidivism (Giordano et al. 2002). Therefore, assisting young women in entering the labor force is a crucial step to working toward a prosocial future.

Life Skills. One of the most salient barriers to reentry that emerged for every young adult woman (n=6)[16] was a lack of life skills needed to live independently. They expressed struggling with budgeting, bill paying, appointment scheduling, cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, riding the bus, applying for jobs, managing debt, and paying taxes. Theresa identifies her age as prohibitive for her, as she was incarcerated at age 18, which gave her no time to build independent life skills prior to incarceration. She noted she was a "kid going in(to)" prison. When asked what her biggest challenge during reentry was, she said, "My mom did everything for me (before prison), I had to learn how to be an adult." She goes on to explain she felt she came out with no independent life

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[16] Amy, a woman who was categorized as later life but also felt her drug use placed her partially in emerging adulthood, also struggled with life-skill deficits.

skills, which made her heavily dependent on her parents and older girlfriend to gain skills needed for independent living.

Like Theresa, Carmen was incarcerated at 19 and had yet to live independently. When asked how it felt to live on her own for the first time, Carmen bluntly stated:

I actually hate it. But I like it because, I can do whatever I want, but I mean me being who I am I've always done whatever I want. But like now that I have to actually pay bills, and I gotta make sure I check my emails to make sure this bill came so I know how much (to pay).

Notably, Carmen's mother has poor health and two young children, making her less able to provide support. Not receiving informational and resource support from her mother made learning life skills especially difficult and burdensome for Carmen.

Despite lacking many skills needed to thrive independently, emerging adult women were often expected to function like independent adults, which caused substantial emotional and relational strain. Carmen spoke to this, pointing out:

I think that's where a lot of people got it mistaken- my aunts and my mom and stuff. They're just like, 'oh you're an adult.' I'm like… you guys forgot that I got locked up? I'm not saying take care of me, but I'm saying take it easy on me.

She continued with a story of asking her mother to teach her to do her laundry, then being rejected because her mother thought she should already be able to do laundry at her age. Carmen felt people assuming she should know a skill and refusing to teach her added substantial strain to her relationships, ultimately driving her towards self-isolation. She

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goes on to describe how the constant emotional wear of independent living caused her anxiety to substantially worsen and made managing her bipolar disorder more difficult. Carmen and Theresa's experience struggling to learn independent life skills and the disjunction between the independence expected of their age and their actual ability was shared by all other young adult women, in addition to Amy.

Social and Emotional Skills. Interpersonal and emotional skills, such as communication, boundary setting, relationship formation, emotional regulation, and impulsivity, were life-stage factor 63 percent of emerging adult women felt hindered their reentry success. Laila, a 26-year-old Black woman, felt learning social skills was crucial to the reentry success of young women, citing, "it's at this age bracket the age of 20 to 30 years where people get into drugs. People get into illegal activities. People get into violence." She goes on to explain that toxic relationships and isolation make her feel more at risk of impulsivity and engaging in drug use, crime, and violent behavior. Laila felt that if she had more knowledge on how to set boundaries, build new relationships, and leave unhealthy people, she and other young women would be less likely to recidivate.

Kiara was particularly concerned that without additional training in how to cope with people treating her worse after prison, feeling she could cause substantial damage to her relationships with her family without more social skills and emotional intelligence. Describing her experience moving home, Kiara said:

> Once I got home, you see my parents were very cold and my mother was
>
> acting like I'm a criminal. So… if I got angry, maybe do something bad

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[…] I could break our relationship permanently. I'm out of prison and they

are tempting me to be rude to them, to be acting a bad way. I wasn't shown

how to deal with such, once I got out of prison, so it's very important.

Kiara felt she did not have the coping skills or emotional intelligence needed to navigate

these complex situations, leaving her to feel depressed and helpless in her ability to

defend herself against poor treatment by her parents. When asked what reentry

programming she felt would be most helpful, Kiara adamantly said more non-violent

communication and coping skills programming is needed.

Coping skills and emotional regulation also impacted young women's ability to

live independently. Indeed, both Laila and Adeline felt unprepared to move from their

parent's house because they depended on their parents for their mental well-being. They

expressed not having the coping skills to manage their mental health issues on their own.

Taken together, women in emerging adulthood routinely identified a greater need for

learning interpersonal skills, emotion regulation, and coping tools for managing difficult

interactions, promoting their independence, and reducing their risk of recidivism.

Social Networks. Unsurprisingly, emerging adult women expressed feeling the

most socially isolated, with early-life women two times as likely to not have three people

nominated in their top three networks, relative to the other age groups. Young women, in

large part, identified their isolation as due to not having the social skills or confidence to

build new relationships. Two other explanations for their network erosion also emerged:

self-isolation and parental restrictions. Among those who lived with their parents or older

sisters (n=4), they felt there was an expectation of "goodness," and that their guardian

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figure policed their interactions out of fear they would return to criminal participation. Not wanting to be treated like a "bad kid", these four women elected to avoid most social interactions in the hope of rebuilding their guardian's trust in their conforming lifestyle. Notably, all four women who isolated as an act of good faith toward their parents were Black women. Chapter 3 suggests this may be in part due to restrictive Black parenting culture. Additional research is needed to explore this association.

People in emerging adult women's social networks removed themselves from networks for a much different reason than those of women in advanced life stages. While some social ties were severed due to disinterest or knifing off from drug-using behavior, young women were unique in having friends dissolve ties due to parental pressure. When asked if she had contact with any of her friends from before her incarceration, Tia, a 20-year-old Black woman, solemnly said:

> I had friends back in high school, but when they heard that (I went to
> prison), their parents usually told them to keep away from me because
> they thought I was a bad influence on their children. So, none of them
> contacted me after (prison).

Tia discussed that her isolation and sense of abandonment made her feel "really, really depressed." Savanah also experienced this, saying:

> (my friends) think I'm not a good person…bad company. And some of
> their parents will tell them not to talk to me, not to be friends with me
> anymore, because 'no one goes to prison for nothing'.

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Likewise, when asked if she had a romantic partner, Kiara responded, "I had… but now, no." She elaborated that he broke up with her when she went to prison, further stating, "I think the parents warned him about associating with me […] so he just cut me off." Kiara also described having to "break up" with her best friend of 15 years because her friend's parents thought she was a bad influence.

Theresa was the only young woman who did not note this form of network attrition, but this is likely due to her pre-prison network being heavily involved in drugs and her intentional knifing off from past friends. Moreover, the other five women had no previous justice involvement and had prosocial families, likely making their time in prison more stigmatizing to their social networks.

For emerging adult women, parents were by far the most common source of support, with all but one young woman nominating their parents in their top three social support network. Indeed, parents comprised almost 47% of their entire nomination network, indicating young women's heavy dependence during this life stage. Sisters were the next most common support, comprising 20% of nominations. Friends and partners played a far less substantial role for younger women, as only 13% nominated a friend, and 13% selected their partner in their top three. In all, 67% of nominations by early-life women came from their immediate family home. Other nominations included an aunt, cousin, and therapist. Aside from the therapist (paid for out of pocket), no young women nominated an individual who provided formal support in their top three.

As expected, life stage influenced the type of support emerging adult women needed and received. Mirroring Chapter 2, parents and sisters functioned in similar

capacities, with older sisters taking on a parenting role when the parents were estranged. Parents and sisters provided up to all four types of support, with resource support through housing, food, and expenses the most common. Next, young women frequently turned to parents and sisters for informational support in the form of teaching independent life skills. However, beyond life skills, parents and siblings rarely had the knowledge to impart other informational support, such as reentry programing, employment, or housing information. Emotional and appraisal support varied heavily depending on the type of relationship respondents had with their parents or sister. If they were strict and prone to judgment, emotional interactions and appraisals were often unwanted. Inversely, women with close relationships with their parents or sisters considered them their dearest confidant. When partners and friends did provide support, it was almost exclusively emotional support. This is likely due to younger acquaintances having less knowledge and resources to share, limiting their ability to provide non-emotional support. Taken together, still not independent, having someone function in a parental capacity is central to young women's success during reentry.

Middle-life Reentry Experiences

Women in the middle-life stage entered prison with more work experience, life skills, and a greater ability to navigate the complexities of adulthood. When asked how her age impacted her reentry, Laura, a 38-year-old white woman, replied:

I think I probably did my reentry at the best age possible, because I have

enough time left to still do something with my life, but I'm old enough to

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have my priorities straight. I also have white suburban home training, you

know, like let's be honest.

She elaborated that by having aged out of the impulsivity and emotional regulation issues she had as a young adult, combined with her advanced life skills, she was set up for a more successful reentry. Imani, a 26-year-old Black woman, agreed, stating, "(my age) really impacted me because I can now make good decisions for myself; I can go back to the mistakes I made before and learn from them." In general, middle-life women's greater experience allowed them to transition more seamlessly into the community than emerging adult women. Their primary barriers to reentry were "classic" collateral consequences (employment, housing, and education), feeling insufficient in their accomplishments, and difficulties related to parenting.

"Classic" Collateral Consequences. Unfortunately, mid-life women's greater life experience did not mean their reentry experience was easier. Rather, mid-adult women struggled substantially with "classic" collateral consequences, such as gaining housing, employment, education, and financial stability. Indeed, with most women in mid-adulthood living independently, they were exposed to typical collateral consequences at a far higher rate than emerging adult women. Mid-adult women were commonly stuck in low-skill labor and struggled to begin their careers due to employers and credentialing institutions baring women with convictions or under active parole supervision. Five of the eight mid-adult women worked in low-skill fields soon after reentry. With frequent rejection due to felony stigma, only three mid-adult women worked full-time for an employer at the time of their interview. Two were unemployed as

they tried to pivot in their career trajectory, two ran their own businesses, and one was a stay-at-home mother.

All but one mid-adult woman who worked in a low-skill position expressed dissatisfaction with their jobs. Kristin explained this was because she felt that low skill-labor was unfulfilling and invalidating of her life stage:

> I just, and I hate to say this, but I got to age where if it's not, I shouldn't
> say easy, but I want to do like a good job. You know? I want to be at a job
> that's gonna be worth something-that I'm gonna enjoy. You know, Tim
> Horton's. Yeah, I could go there part time and be happy. At the end of
> then the day though, it's a restaurant. It's a coffee place, you know? I could
> really see myself somewhere secretarial, or staffing the books somewhere
> […] But because of my background, I can't get those good jobs. I can't
> even get a housekeeping job.

The other middle adult women shared this sentiment, noting that most felon-friendly industries were in low skill labor, which was unfulfilling and beneath their maturity level. They all desired careers in more meaningful spaces. Three saw starting their own business as their routes to success, whereas the five others all felt social work or drug rehabilitation would be a career that not only accepts, but values their histories.

Cammy, a 33-year-old white woman, also noted that low-skill labor, such as food service, is an environment often rife with drug use, which was harmful to women in recovery:

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I did not want to work fast food I did not apply to any fast-food jobs only

because I know where that environment takes me. My experience with that

has always been negative, you know the cooks in the back the other

waitresses they party and so I know where that takes me.

In all, low skill labor was not only perceived as meaningless labor that undermined

women's maturity, but it also could raise women's risk of recidivism through exposing

them to drug using crowds.

Finding housing was incredibly difficult, leading mid-adult women to be

homeless, live in subpar housing, have other people sign their lease, or rely on personal

referrals. At the time of their interviews, 63 percent of mid-adult woman lived with their

romantic partner, 26 percent with their parents, and only one living independently.

Though all women felt their housing was currently stable, only two of the eight women in

middle-adulthood reported feeling extremely satisfied, safe, and comfortable in their

current living situation. The other six women reported difficulties with feeling unsafe in

their current neighborhood, living in rundown or low-quality apartments, and not having

enough space for their children to live with them. Despite having more stable housing

now, only two mid-adult women maintained the same housing since they were released;

Imani still lives with her mother and Gabrielle immediately returned to her own house.

The other six women experienced substantial housing inconsistency, living in 2-4

locations since their release. This inconsistency was primarily due to lack of funds and

landlords refusing to rent to those with felony records.

Though education was considered a core route to success, the four mid-adult women seeking higher education experienced barriers related to their felony convictions and active parole supervision. A full-time student at the time of her incarceration, Adeline could not resume her education at a large 4-year university because they have a policy against students attending if they are on parole or probation. Laura and Kristin were seeking degrees or credentials for social work and found they were barred from completing the program, as the mandatory internships or practicums required women to not only be off parole but to have committed their felony at least 5-10 years prior.

Interviewees grew frustrated talking about having to halt their education, seeing it as one of the few attainable routes to a conforming lifestyle. Regarding her experience of being blocked from returning to her university, Adeline said, "it really upsets me because I've already had all these other roadblocks because I made a mistake in life. I was so upset I wanted to call the Dean's office and all this stuff. But I just let it go." Thus, though education was strongly pushed on women during reentry, the women who turned to education were frequently unable to reap the benefits due to record discrimination.

In sum, mid-adult women faced greater barriers to employment, housing, and education than emerging adult women. Primarily living with their parents, either unemployed or working in entry-level jobs, and not yet planning to attend or resume their higher education, emerging adult women were more sheltered from these felony-based stigmas and barriers faced by older women.

Not Measuring Up. Now in a stage of life where society expects complete independence, mid-life women found it difficult to meet cultural expectations. All

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women in this life stage expressed feeling the need to "catch up" with their age cohort, noting their time in prison combined with collateral consequences made them feel behind on markers of adulthood. Women felt strongly that their careers and education were key to bettering their circumstances. Though the women in mid-adulthood were quickly able to find employment in low-skill work after release, they felt was infantilizing and invalidating to their maturity and life stage. Jada, a 33-year-old Black woman, talked at length about the stress she experienced feeling behind in her life stage:

> You're older, you don't have as much time to waste play around, you to get
>
> some type of savings, retirement. But I feel like I'm playing catch up now.
>
> I'm literally trying to play catch up, I don't want that.

She had been able to get a decent-paying manual labor job soon after prison but lost it due to an on-the-job injury. As a well-qualified candidate, Jada routinely made it far in the interview process when she began searching for desk jobs she could do with her new disability. However, once prospective employers ran her background check, they all denied her application. Now, after months of unemployment and substantial medical bills, Jada's inability to create a better life for her child and save for their future is highly distressing for her.

The rest of the women interviewed in this life stage shared similar stories as Jada, finding the low skill work they were able to attain with a criminal record was unfulfilling and did not provide enough financial stability. Entrepreneurship was seen by most women as one of the best ways to achieve conventional success, as they felt being their own boss was the only way to avoid discrimination in their desired fields. The other route

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women commonly took was to seek higher education and credentials in social work or drug rehabilitation counseling. Women felt they would be less likely to be rejected from a career where their experience in the justice system would help them relate to clients. In all, though careers were one of mid-adult women's highest priorities, they often struggled to get the higher-skilled jobs they desired due to felony stigma, which negatively impacted their mental health and financial stability.

Other factors that also contributed to women's feelings of inadequacy relative to their life stage was financial instability, lack of retirement and insurance, poor housing, and inability to have their children live with them. Taken together, women feel substantial pressure and emotional strain related to demonstrating independence and markers of adult success, which is compounded by collateral consequences making the achievement of these milestones more difficult.

Mothering. Children were a salient part of middle-aged women's lives, as 75% were mothers. Some women felt mothering was a salient part of their identity, with both the role of mother and interactions with their children improving their mental well-being and encouraging them to continue working toward a conforming future. Despite past work emphasizing the importance of children for women's return from prison (Crew et al. 2017; Ferraro and Moe 2003; Gobena et al. 2022), no mothers turned to their children for social support. Rather, when children were perceived to have a positive impact on reentry, it was due to quality time and validation of their identities as mothers. Moreover, mothers were divided on the role their children played during their reentry. The division was spread across reasons for desistance and relationship quality with children.

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Past work had heavily emphasized children as a reason for women to desist (Giordano et al. 2002; Parsons and Warner-Robbins 2002). Surprisingly, of the eight middle-adult mothers[17], four noted their children were not related to their desire to work toward a conventional lifestyle, rather citing a crystallization of discontent (Paternoster and Bushway 2009) in their current lifestyle that drove them to change. When asked if her children played a role in her desistance, Cammy candidly told me:

> I want to be one of those people that are like, 'my kids got me to get clean', but I'm not. I'm just being real […] When a lot of women are doing interviews like this, they tell you what you want to hear. 'Oh, my kids are my motivation' because they don't want you to look at them like they're a piece of s***. So, they'll say whatever, but I'm just being honest that was not my motivation. My motivation was me. I wanted something different; I was tired of being tired.

Kristin shared a similar sentiment, saying:

> My main motivator was me, myself, and I. Like 'I'm going to die if I don't do it something.' It was getting real bad. If I actually look back, I could have died if I didn't go to prison at that time.

Women who did not consider their children a reason for desistance did not report their children as helpful in their reentry. Thus, counter to what the bulk of motherhood and reentry work suggests, children did not always provide a reason for women to seek reentry success and avoid recidivism.

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[17] This includes Amy and Carmen, who have overlap with other life-stages.

Having conflictual relationships with children made reentry more difficult for two women. When asked if anyone she knew made her reentry more difficult, Amy deadpanned, "my 12-year-old son." With her extensive history of drug addiction and incarceration, Amy felt her son resented her absence for most of his life. After leaving prison, she gained custody of him, and he briefly lived with her. He routinely acted out, drank, smoked marijuana, and used graphic slurs to refer to her. She found that his drug use and mental abuse were making her consider using drugs again. For her own well-being, Amy had her son move back in with his father. Like Amy, Laura struggled with her daughter's animosity related to her incarceration, which made their relationships volatile. Therefore, the strain of poor relationship quality with children made some women's reentry experience more difficult and can potentially lead to recidivism or addiction relapse.

Custody of children was salient source of stress in three of the women's lives. Both Kristin and Jada felt the guardian of their children drove a wedge between their relationship with their children. When asked how she felt about co-parenting, Kristin began to cry, saying:

> I love my son to pieces, and it took me forever to be where I'm at today (sober). I think he's just been so coached to hate me. And no matter how hard I try, that kid is just like so blocked. And the father doesn't even answer a text. Like come on, let's communicate, lets co-parent! […] Everybody lives in the past, so what's a girl to do? You know I've been looking online honestly, and God forbid, but how to sign off rights.

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Because they're charging me out the a** for child support, and I get to see

the kids what, three, four times a year? They don't even answer their

phone when I try to call.

Jada also expressed struggling with her child's guardian prohibiting her from visiting due

to her criminal history. In a slightly different vein, Cammy's mental health suffered due

to her decision to put her child up for adoption when she was still addicted to drugs.

When considering the expense of child support and custody battles, time sink, and

emotional drain of custody issues, in line with past work, it is apparent that custody

issues of young children impede mid-adult women's reentry and mental health.

The final reentry barrier related to motherhood is the resources having custody of

a child can consume. Indeed, for the four women who have custody of their children,

finding sufficient housing, time, and financial resources can be difficult. For example,

Laura has custody of her youngest daughter and desperately wants to fully step into her

mothering role. However, she lives in a small, one-bedroom apartment in a different

school district from where her daughter attends. Not wanting to disrupt her daughter's

life, Laura has asked her parents to keep her daughter until she can find a landlord in their

affluent suburb who is willing to rent to someone with a record. Finding housing suitable

for their children to join them or have better living conditions was a primary concern for

middle-life women, as they regularly encountered housing discrimination related to their

felony. Less discussed but still prevalent is the need for childcare while working, but

between parents, partners, and the rise in remote work, no women were unable to work

due to the demands of mothering.

Social Networks. Middle-life women had the most diverse social networks among the life stages. They primarily turned to their parents (32%), partners (23%), friends (23%), and siblings (9%), with fathers of children, extended family, and formal supports also making up a small portion of their networks. While parents were still the most common form of support, mid-adult women were substantially less reliant on their parents. Parents primarily offered childcare, emotional support, and resource support in the form of cosigning housing leases or providing financial assistance as needed. Notably, mid-adult women received markedly less financial assistance than young women, as they were expected to be more self-sufficient. Many mid-adult women lived with their parents immediately after leaving prison but soon moved out due to relationship conflict, desiring more agency or to raise their children according to their own ideals. At the time of sampling, only two mid-life women still lived with their parents. Thus, while middle adult women do turn to their parents for support, especially immediately after their release, their greater life experience allows them to function independently much sooner than emerging adult women.

Partners primarily provided emotional support and resource support in the form of housing, though some also contributed financially to the household. Women commonly lived with their partners (63%), demonstrating mid-adult women's far higher reliance on partners than women from other life stages. Given the high volumes of cohabitating and that partners comprise 23% of middle-life women's support networks, past work that ignores the life stage likely underestimates the role partners play for women in this age group (Clone and DeHart 2014; Goodson 2018; Goodson-Miller 2022). Friends and

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sisters provided similar levels and forms of support, often being emotional, appraisal, and finite resource support. Middle-adult women were more likely to have friends from inside prison in their network, who also provided informational support related to reentry and job seeking, in addition to housing support as women first transitioned from prison. In all, middle-life women's more diverse social networks give them greater access to a greater variety of social support and social capital, which gives them more opportunities during reentry than emerging adult women.

Mature-Adults

Women in the mature life stage had significantly more life experience, with most of them having established careers and two owning homes. Their family lives were also more developed than women at other life stages, with all of them having adult children, five having grandchildren, and three having been married. Women in this life stage spent the most time in prison preparing for their reentry, in large part due to their substantial sentences, but also due to their greater knowledge of independent living demands. Later-life women felt their greatest advantage during reentry relative to the other life stages was their mental maturity. When asked how her life stage impacted her reentry, LaTasha, a Black woman aged 47, responded:

> I think that it has impacted me greatly, because I'm more mature; I have
> more insight. Because when I went in, man I was young and dumb. But
> now the insight that I have on myself, life, and knowing how to reach out
> (for help) has changed my trajectory as a person and as a woman.

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LaTasha later added that she had previously been unwilling to learn from people or ask for support as a younger woman, which she felt prevented her from fully adapting and recovering from her trauma until now.

Trisha also felt time to self-reflect was an advantage, noting:

So, my age… I'm getting older. I'm 45 years old. I went to prison when I was 36, and I grew a lot of wisdom in prison. A lot of wisdom. I looked back on my life. Where did I go wrong? What did I do wrong? How did I raise my children? What did they see that I did? Like everything… you think of everything. And you know you have to forgive yourself for some things that you did. You grow older and you grow wiser. And what comes with that is, when you're in a situation that you can't control. You sometimes get irritated with yourself for what you've done (but now you can forgive yourself).

Trisha expressed that forgiving herself was central to moving past the trauma and drug addiction in her past. Thus, while mature women may have more career and life experience that can help them during reentry, they identify their primary strength relative to other life stages as being wiser, more established in their self-identity, and having time to learn from their past.

Shock of Transition. After years of incarceration, past literature suggests prisonization would most saliently impact later-life women's reentry experience (Clemmer 1940; Irwin and Owen 2005; Martin 2018; McKendy and Ricciardelli 2021). While most mature women did note some difficulty relating to a shift into greater

autonomy, more stimulating environments, and non-prison culture, they considered culture, infrastructure, and technology changes to be significantly more impactful to their reentry. Indeed, two-thirds of later-life women expressed feeling left behind by society and technology and experienced great difficulty trying to "catch up".[18] With the longest term of incarceration in the sample, Gloria, a 73-year-old Black woman, struggled with the advance of technology. She recounted a time soon after her release when she got stranded for hours until her son picked her up, due to her inability to use Uber. Likewise, her internet illiteracy limited her ability to search for jobs, find housing, and remain connected.

LaTasha added that she was incarcerated in 1999, right when computers were becoming common. Upon her release, technology had changed so much, that she experienced "complete culture shock". She further expanded:

> I feel like as much as I learn it's still outdated because something new comes out. It's hard to keep up with this technology. It makes you isolated in a way. Unless you know it, you feel like you're behind the times. And I already feel like I've been behind the times since I've been in 15 years, so now I REALLY feel behind the times.

Trisha shared a similar sentiment, commenting that push-button cars, Bluetooth, telehealth appointments, and self-checkouts were all confusing and took substantial time to navigate. Lori, a 57-year-old white woman, was surprised she struggled to acclimate to

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[18] The two mature women who did not were incarcerated for four years or less, leaving little time for society and technology to have changed much in their absence.

technology, commenting, "I'm kind of a nerdy person, so I really love the technology and I thought it would be a lot easier for me than it really is. It is more challenging than I expected."

Returning to a post-COVID-19 landscape so heavily reliant on the internet compounded mature women's issues with technology. When discussing her culture shock transitioning from prison, LaTasha quipped, "and it was right at the end of COVID, so everything was online. Zoom this, Zoom that. Where are we zooming too?!" to express how lost she felt reentering during the COVID-19 lockdown. Trisha had the same issue, discussing a stressful experience of having to attend a doctor's appointment over Zoom, where the doctor had to spend time coaching her on how to get into the appointment. Both Lori and Trisha had to get new government IDs after their release, which was an online process during the pandemic. After substantial difficulty using the online interface to complete this task, when trying to call for assistance, both got automated messages and grew frustrated they couldn't reach real people to help them. Gloria also struggled with non-face-to-face interactions, explaining, "there was nobody available to talk to one-on-one, face to face. You had to go through the telephone to talk to anyone. I think that it made finding employment or housing more difficult than it would have been otherwise." Gloria felt that her inability to plead her case and explain her record to people in person heightened the stigma she experienced from her record.

Beyond technology changes, Trisha and Gloria felt shifts in infrastructure and culture were also difficult to acclimate to. They found the city had changed substantially, with gentrifying neighborhoods, urban growth, and new streets. Getting lost, feeling out

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of place, and driving the wrong way up a previously two-way street was common for them. Trisha also feels the state of society and politics means "society is very bad off", which makes her more reticent to reintegrate. Last, Amy and Trisha noted they are "old school" in their preferred leisure activities, with different cultural preferences making it more difficult for them to build social relationships. In all, building on past work (Stojkovic 2007; Western et al. 2015; Western 2018), I find the substantial changes that occur in a society's technology, infrastructure, and culture make reintegrating with the community particularly jarring and stressful for mature adult women. Returning to the community during or after COVID-19 exacerbated these issues, due to an abrupt increase in internet reliance.

Employment Barriers. Despite having substantially more life experience, older women struggled with their careers due to prolonged removal from society and heightened stigma. With the highest average sentence length of any life stage (nearly 15 years), prolonged removal from society impacted later-life women through absence from the labor market and dated job skills. A hairstylist by trade, Gloria struggled to return to her former career because of her age and dated job skills:

My age, my age doesn't allow me to be in certain areas, or you know like

if I apply for something […] They think I won't be able to perform

different services as well. And they have these new (hair) stylist

applications because I've been out of the loop so long. So, you might not

be up to date and need more training. And if you are willing to take some

training, they're not willing to pay for the training. So, I can't take it with

the limited amount of income that I receive a month so that prohibits me

from moving forward.

Gloria considered starting her own salon, but after decades removed from society, she no longer had clients. She had invested so much time into honing her skills as a hair stylist that she was unwilling to change her career trajectory. Thus, she was stuck between not having the current skills needed to succeed in her career, and feeling she would waste her experience if she worked in a different field. Ultimately, Gloria remained unemployed. Counter to my hypothesis, Gloria was the only mature woman who clearly identified length away from her career and dated skills as a limitation to her employment. Rather, their conviction status and aged based stigma played a larger role in hindering mature women's employment efforts.

One-third of the mature women sampled worked in health care industries that prohibit the employment of felons, requiring them to shift careers and rendering their skills obsolete. For example, Trisha used to be an in-home nurse but found hospice care organizations had strict policies against employees holding criminal records. After learning this, Trisha had to pivot and start her own business in an unrelated field. LaTasha noted criminal record stigma may be heightened for women returning after long periods of incarceration, as as she observed employers were unwilling to hire them because of her violent offense record:

I think that employers always react when they find out you have an

institutional record. There are some companies, depending on your crime,

that will not hire you.

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Gloria also added that she has feels specifically having a violent offence relative to non-violent offences has been of particular concern to salons she has applied to.

Turing to age-based stigma, Gloria and Lori, the oldest women in the sample aside from Fayth, felt that employers were more reticent to hire elderly women. As described above, Gloria experienced active discrimination against her age, as salons assumed she would be too old to keep up with the fast-paced work. Lori ultimately did not experience discrimination against her age and ability, but describes being hesitant to apply for a higher paying, more physical job:

> I could have had (this job) as soon as I came out of the halfway house, but I was kind of afraid to take a chance on doing the factory. I was afraid it would be more than I could handle because I am 57 years old (and I have a lot of health issues). I'm like man, I don't wanna take this job, and then it put kind of like a smudge on (the reentry program that referred her) if I can't do it.

Lori and Gloria's experiences illustrate that both actual and potential age-based discrimination and limitations can hinder employment opportunities.

In sum, though two thirds of the mature women had spent substantial time developing their careers prior to incarceration, all but one was barred from returning to their fields due to their advanced age or criminal records. Fayth owned her own business and was incarcerated for a shorter period, so her career was not impacted. In all, though mature women have substantial work experience, they often do not resume their careers. Rather, they restart in the same place as middle-aged women. Later-life women may be

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even more disadvantaged in finding employment due to age and violent crime stigma, in addition to unwillingness to begin a new career late in life.

 Health Concerns. Mature women's reentry was also plagued by medical issues, with half reporting substantial health issues. When asked what the most difficult part of her reentry was, Gloria responded:

> Well, I have a lot of health problems. I know if I had gotten a job right
>
> away that I probably would have been fired. Since being home, I've had
>
> breast cancer and then diverticulitis. Going back and forth from the doctor
>
> to the hospital-you know that's a lot going on.

Gloria continued to explain how these health issues delayed other needed steps for her reentry, such as submitting paperwork for a new social security card. Gloria also felt her health and physical disability limited her ability to work on her feet at a salon all day.

 Fayth, a 58-year-old Black woman, noted that incarceration itself made her health worse, explaining "asbestos, mold, and mildew, and anything that's bad for you is in those (prison) walls." After experiencing respiratory issues during reentry, Fayth was diagnosed with Carcinosis. When asked if she had any health complications that made her reentry more difficult, Lori rattled off, "I have lupus, I have degenerative disc disease, I have osteoporosis, I have fibromyalgia, AND I have arthritis." Notably, these three women were the oldest in the sample (all over 50), suggesting that health issues and disability become a prevalent concern for women reentering past the age of 50. This was consistent even for Fayth, who was incarcerated for two decades less than Gloria and Lori and had lived an upper middle-class lifestyle prior to prison.

In addition to the financial burden of medical bills caused by their health complications, mature women's diminished health and disability impacted their reentry through workplace difficulty. Lori elaborated that her health issues had made finding a job difficult, as her current job required physical labor and her age and health made her employers uncertain she could perform the work. As mentioned above, Gloria was unable to apply for a job because her schedule was too busy with cancer treatment, leaving her unable to work consistent hours. Taken together, mature women face severe health concerns on top of other barriers to reentry, which can limit women's ability to work, establish their new lives, and complete parole requirements. Moreover, with high rates of unemployment, lack of health insurance can compound the economic insecurity experienced by mature women and limit their ability to seek medical care.

Dependent Adults. The final complication unique to later-life women's reentry is dependent adults. As noted in the literature on reentry experiences, older women are often primary sources of social support (Cobbina 2010; Shollenberger 2009; Valera et al. 2015; Western et al. 2015). There was no exception to this rule for one third of the mature respondents. Indeed, upon her release, Lori was immediately asked to give her justice-involved brother money and to pay his bills, at the expense of her own reentry success.

Similarly, while she and her sister were incarcerated, Trisha's mother was diagnosed with dementia. Trisha considered her mother the second greatest social support next to her sister, but as her mother's condition worsened, she provided less support and required more care and around-the-clock supervision. The sisters must now revolve their

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lives around their mother's care, taking opposite work schedules from each other and so on is always available, alternating who their mother lives with, and generally providing for their mother. Trisha also has a daughter heavily involved in drug use which has caused her substantial strife:

> My youngest child is an addict and she's currently on fentanyl. Pregnant
>
> on fentanyl. I've been battling that and trying to help her understand. I
>
> took her to all these programs, and she gets she gets clean, and then she
>
> relapses and gets clean, and then she relapses, and so that's a battle for me
>
> […] She's just out there. It's bad. She's bad off right now.

Trisha continued, sharing that her youngest daughter is pregnant with her third kid. The daughter's first two children were born while Trisha was in prison and adopted by various family members. Trisha is resigned to adopting her new grandson since she can't tolerate the idea of him going into the system. Already taking care of her ailing mother, Trisha will soon be balancing a newborn in addition to reintegrating with society after prison.

In conclusion, mature women's social networks by nature are more likely to have aging, ailing relatives and adult children who require support. They are also more likely to be perceived by others as people to turn to in times of need. Thus, later-life women not only have to care for themselves during reentry, but also may have other adults relying on them. This dependence further limited successful reentry through consuming time, money, and mental energy.

Networks. Women in the later life stage experienced substantial network attrition, leaving them with few family members or friends to nominate in their top three support network. The most prevalent type of tie nominated in mature women's top three was formal support through prison reentry, drug addiction, and domestic violence programming (53%). Siblings were the next most common providers of support, comprising 18% of women's top three networks. The remaining nominations were equally divided across adult children, parents, husbands, and extended family (one nomination each). Partners played a finite role in mature women's social networks, with only one woman in a relationship. Partners were a common reason mature women received multi-decade sentences, resulting in relationship absolution. For the rest, drug addiction and sexual trauma prohibited mature women from forming lasting relationships prior to their incarceration. Amy and Trisha formed relationships while in prison but ended the relationships soon after release. While Amy and Lori show interest in jumping back into the dating pool, LaTasha, Gloria, and Trisha feel it is not worth the hassle.

Turning to the types of support available to later-life women, siblings provided resource, emotional, and informational support.[19] This included helping mature women find jobs, housing, reentry resources, and caring for dependent adults. The one husband nominated only provided financial support. This is discussed more in-depth in chapter three, as substantial tie duality is present in their relationship. Though Trisha nominated her mother in her top three, this was more out of deference for the support her mother

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[19] Formal support was discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Given most quotes in that section were from later-life women, I will not discuss formal support in detail here.

used to provide prior to her dementia, as now Trisha takes care of her mother. Gloria considered her minister her most important provider of emotional support. He would also ask the congregation for financial support if needed. Last, Gloria's extended family provided her with emotional support. Altogether, even when later-life women did have informal support to nominate, the supporters provided less variety and volume of support than women in earlier life stages.

One prevalent reason for middle-life women's substantial reliance on formal support is the network attrition stemming from poor health and the passing of family members. In a later life stage themselves, mature women often outlived their relatives while incarcerated. Indeed, Amy was the only mature adult who did not have at least one relative succumb to dementia or death. Gloria gave a stark recounting of her social network attrition during her decades in prison:

> My oldest sister, and my oldest brother. I was the closest to them, and they
>
> supported me as much as they could. In 95 my oldest brother died, so it
>
> was hard, the death of a close family member. A close brother. He was a
>
> friend, my everything. After he passed on, it was my sister and my first
>
> husband-I was married twice. They were supportive as well. […] My
>
> uncle passed the same day that I went to the parole board.

Thus, Gloria's only remaining relatives were her descendants. Likewise, LaTasha spoke at length about losing her brother right before prison and her mother during her incarceration. She noted that not only did she lose her support network, but she also couldn't properly grieve them while in prison, making it all the harder. Fayth also lost her

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father while in prison. Though Trisha's mother still lives, her dementia has also removed her from Trisha's support network. Therefore, a key explanation for later-life women's anemic social networks is the death or illness of close friends or relatives.

Past work has suggested adult children may be substantial origins of support for their returning mothers (La Vigne et al. 2009). With few of their older family members still alive, it further stands to reason that adult children would be a primary source of support. In conflict with this expectation, only Gloria relied on her children in her transition home. Regarding the type of support availible, her son provided instrumental support in the form of rent assistance, groceries, and connecting her with odd jobs. Another central form of support provided was informational, particularly regarding the use of technology. Interestingly, though Gloria was the only woman to identify her children as a support, most mature women turn to their young grandchildren to teach them how to use technology, considering them more adept than their own children.

When considering why more later-life women did not rely on their adult children, relational conflict became an apparent driver. Indeed, Gloria was the only mature woman who managed to maintain a good relationship with her children during her years in prison. Both Latasha and Fayth were on speaking terms with their children, but they live in different states and are not very interactive. Further, neither child remained in contact with them during prison, making their relationships rather new and tenuous. Lori has no contact with her adult children. She was incarcerated for their father's death, which she thinks makes her children afraid of her. Her children's unwillingness to have contact had a substantial negative impact on Lori's mental health. In a slightly different vein, with

one of Trisha's daughters addicted to drugs and the other a new mother, she did not feel she could turn to her children for support. In all, while adult children can be one of the few sources of informal support women have left, volatile relationships with children are highly common, adult children may not be in a place to provide support, and/or mature women may not want to burden their children, which can prevent later-life women from leveraging support from them.

Discussion

Within desistance research, the life stage has long been theorized as a key component of a successful reentry (Giordano et al. 2002; Kim and Bushway 2018; Laub and Sampson 1993; Moffit 1993). Despite the prevalence of life stage in desistance, past work has yet to examine how life stage differentially impacts women's reentry experiences. I fill this gap by assessing the variance in reentry experience across emerging adults, mid-adults, and later-life adults. Next, I address how social network composition and density vary by life stage. Then, I consider if social networks unique to women's different life stages meet the distinct needs of women in that life stage. Last, I underscore the role the life stage plays in the attenuation of women's social support networks and the absence of informal social support.

Emerging adult, mid-life, and later-life women all encountered barriers to reentry unique to their life stage. Young women's difficulties stemmed from their lack of life experience, with shortsighted future goals, finite work exposure, scant independent living skills, and undeveloped interpersonal skills limiting their ability to function as

independent adults and fully reintegrate into society. The experiences of women in mid-adulthood were most consistent with collateral consequence research (Kirk and Wakefield 2018), suggesting not considering life stage in reentry research obscures the nuanced challenges of early and later life reentries. Indeed, mid-adult women were primarily concerned with finding stable housing, receiving higher education, beginning meaningful careers, and being mothers. Meanwhile, later-life women experienced issues related to the shock of returning to a society technologically and culturally changed, prolonged removal from the labor force, heightened stigma, poor health, and dependent adults. To sum up, when considering the substantial contrast in women's reentry barriers across life stages, it becomes clear life stage considerations must be made when studying reentry and recidivism.

Social network composition and access to social support varied considerably across women in different stages of life. Young women were faced with notable isolation, often struggling to produce three people they could turn to for support. Their informal support primarily came from parents and siblings. Emerging adult women predominantly received instrumental and informational support, with emotional and appraisal support provision being dependent on family relationship quality and guardian strictness. Mid-adult women had the most diverse social networks and the widest access to all four varieties of social support. Thus, mid-life women were more able to harness their network to improve their life chances and find opportunities. Turning to mature women, the only informal relations that consistently remained in their networks were siblings. This was in large part due to older relatives passing away during incarceration. With

decimated informal networks, mature women relied heavily on formal programming to support their reentry efforts. Of note, women in earlier life stages seldom used formal support, citing not knowing of available programs, or failing to receive formal support when petitioned. Chapter 2 suggests mature women's greater integration with in-prison networks and active networking with program facilitators while still incarcerated dramatically increased their ability to leverage formal support relative to younger women.

Though women in all stages of life felt their social networks dwindle during incarceration, emerging adults and later-life women saw their networks fall away due to additional factors specific to their life stage. Young women's networks were heavily restricted by stigma, with some opting to self-isolate in the hope their parents would perceive them as less deviant and others losing friends or romantic partners due to the parents of their connections forbidding the relationship from continuing. Emerging adult women routinely noted this isolation led to depression and a sense of hopelessness. Mature women experienced informal network erosion due to their time away, causing conflict and strain or by losing touch. One of the most considerable explanations for close supports leaving mature women's networks was death or illness, as many of their connections were elderly. Though mature women faced the most complete network erosion, they did not express feeling isolated to the same extent as young women, commenting they have lived full lives and are involved in vibrant church, reentry, and neighborhood communities. Moreover, most later-life women took pride in being self-sufficient and had access to an array of formal supports. Thus, they may not have felt a limited informal network to be as depressing or constraining as emerging adult women.

By considering the appreciable divergence in reentry barriers and access to social support across life stages, this chapter advances the current body of research on reentry and recidivism. Specifically, through a comparison of reentry experiences, I illuminate pain points of reentry specific to different life stages that advise future research and policy. I then supply the type of tie women primarily leverage for social support across life stages, which gives a more nuanced view into women's social support networks during reentry. By understanding who women turn to at different life stages to get certain needs met, researchers and policymakers can better understand what deficits in women's informal networks formal programming is needed to fill. Finally, by exploring what factors contribute to informal network erosion, I provide a mechanism to identify which women may be most in need of formal support and intervention.

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Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusion

Returning home from prison is often much anticipated yet is accompanied by a host of barriers making reintegration into society incredibly difficult (Kirk and Wakefield 2018). Prison reentry is marked by collateral consequences stemming from criminal record stigma and prolonged removal from society that can negatively impact employment (Lyons and Pettit 2011; Western 2002; Western and Pettit 2005), housing (Harding et al. 2013; Herbert et al. 2015), finances and debt (Harris 2016; Harris, Evans, and Beckett 2010; Schwatrz-Soicher et al. 2011; Sugie 2012), civic participation (Behrens, Uggen, and Manza 2003; Manza and Uggen 2006; Weaver et al. 2014), mental and physical health (Massoglia and Pridemore 2015; Sugie and Turney 2017; Widleman and Muller 2012), and interpersonal relationships (Apel 2016; Turney 2015). Limited work suggests with the intersecting disadvantage of gender and justice involvement, women face additional hardships during reentry than men (Scroggins and Malley 2010; Wakefield and Uggen 2010; Wildeman and Muller 2012). This is supported by findings that women have higher recidivism rates than men, with two-thirds of women returning to prison within five years of release (Durose, Cooper, and Snyder 2014). Of concern, despite more challenging reentry climates, women have less access to in-prison and community reentry programming than men (Duwe and Clark 2017; Scroggins and Malley 2010). Thus, one of the few readily available means to ease women's return from prison is social support from their personal networks (Huebner and Pleggenkuhle 2015;

Scroggins and Malley 2010), making women more heavily reliant on their personal networks than men (Cobbina 2010; La Vigne 2009; Shollenberger 2009).

Given the marked importance of women's social networks for their reentry success, it is crucial to understand the mechanics behind women's access to different forms of social support. Past work has begun to explore the complexities of women's social support networks, indicating certain relationships may provide more or less forms (E.g., informational, instrumental, emotional, and appraisal) and volume of social support (Goodson 2018; Reisig, Holtfreter, and Morash 2002; Valera et al. 2015). Further, prior research also introduces the notion that women's social support networks may not be purely supportive, but rather have detrimental elements of relational conflict (Falkin and Strauss 2003; Leverentz 2006; Willgning et al. 2016). Last, though changes in social networks across life stages are central to criminological theory, scant work has explored how access to social support varies across women's stage in life (Giordano et al. 2002; Laub and Sampson 1993; Valera et al. 2017). To gain a deeper understanding of this deficit, I analyzed 20 in-depth interviews with women released from an Ohio prison in the last three years. This dissertation adds to the current literature on women's reentry experience by illuminating the origins of women's social support and factors that influence the level and type of social support women receive. Moreover, it addresses the nuances of women's needs during reentry and how social support meets or exacerbates these needs.

Beginning with Chapter 2, I explore to whom women turn for social support and what forms of social support women receive from different roles in their social network

(E.g., formal support, parent, sibling, partner, close friend, extended family, loose tie). Specifically, I first assess the extent and variety of support women receive from formal reentry and community programming. Then, by asking women who their top three supporters are during their reentry, I consider who in their informal network is the most supportive and how their network role impacts the different forms of support the relation can or will offer. Last, I examined what factors influence the removal of a member from women's social networks.

Consistent with past work, women had mixed experiences with formal social support, with most finding formal support to be far less available than expected (Cobbina 2010). In many cases, women reported feeling formal support added more strain than benefit to their reentry experience. However, three women felt formal programming met their needs and bolstered their reentry success, which raised the question of how women in that same system can have substantially different experiences with formal programming. Notably, Chapter 4 revealed these women were exclusively later-life women. Further investigation found that mature women spent longer in prison building connections with reentry programs, which gave them access to the most supportive programs immediately upon release. Conversely, younger women did not seek these connections while incarcerated, resulting in them being unaware of available programs or only in contact with less supportive programs. Past work demonstrated a similar trend, noting many women feel their in-prison preparation did little to ready them for reentry or connect them with reentry programming (Slaght 1999; Valera et al. 2017; Willing et al. 2016). This chapter adds to past work by finding women's successful receipt of

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programming is in part dependent on their social networking skills and length of incarceration.

Further supporting past research, Chapter 2 demonstrated that women rely far more heavily on their informal social support network than formal supports (Cobbina 2010; Shollenberger 2009; Valera et al. 2015). Women primarily turned to nuclear family members (parents and siblings) for support, followed by close friends and romantic partners. Importantly, the forms of support women had access to often depended on which roles women included in their top supporter network. Moreover, not all relationship ties were found equal in the extent of support they were willing to provide, or the level of support women were willing to request. As we see in the following chapters, a large part of this variation is due to relational conflict and life stage.

Prior research does not always distinguish the exact role a social supporter holds, instead using broad categories of "family" or "friends" (Cobbina 2010; La Vigne et al. 2005; Leverentz 2006; Salisbury and Van Voorhis 2009; Valera et al. 2015). This chapter emphasizes the importance of considering the unique aspects of each relationship type, as I find extended family matters far less for social support than the nuclear family. Likewise, close friends and distant friends played far different roles in women's support system, and justice-involved friends provided differential support than non-justice-involved friends. Thus, by merging all family and friends into singular categories, past work may be under-emphasizing the magnitude that close relations play in women's reentry. To further illuminate this, I examined the role of loose (distant) ties in women's reentry, finding that these ties provided limited to no social support, but can function as

social capital to connect women with information or opportunities. Last, I find that women's network attrition during incarceration is largely restricted to the loss of loose ties. This is an important realization, as previous research characterizes women's social networks as vastly diminished on reentry (Coughenour 1995; Crewe et al. 2017; Kreager and Kruttschnitt 2018; Valera et al. 2017), suggesting women have little to no informal support network. Yet, I find that while their networks do reduce in size, women's core support network remains largely intact. Thus, women's important connections are often more durable than assumed.

Though women rarely lose contact with close relations during incarceration, Chapter 3 raises the point that relationship longevity does not mean the relationship is exclusively beneficial. Indeed, by considering the role of relational tension in women's access to social support, I demonstrate that women regularly have at least one relationship in their top three support network that has "tie-complexity," meaning the tie has both positive and negative impacts on women's reentry experience. Tie-complexity most commonly occurs between women and their parents or siblings, suggesting that while close family are the most likely to remain in women's support networks throughout their justice involvement, their relationships can become strained from this process. Relationship conflict also stemmed from past abuse or trauma history with a relation, or lack of understanding, yet it primarily stemmed from stigma and conflict directly related to women's justice involvement and/or drug use.

Importantly, women who had tie-complexity with a network member received less social support. This was in part due to complex ties being less willing to provide

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support, but also because women were less willing to request support from people they perceived a tie-complexity with. The type of support women were willing to request from a complex tie was primarily limited to resource and informational support, as women did not feel comfortable seeking emotional or appraisal support from a complex tie, particularly if the emotional support was needed to cope with the conflict originating from the tie-complexity. Of concern, feeling reliant on a complex tie was damaging to women's mental health, with women who experienced a tie-complexity in their core support network more likely to report depression, anxiety, self-doubt, and hopelessness. Though past work has mentioned women have relational conflict within their support network during reentry (Falkin and Strauss 2003; Leverentz 2006; Willgning et al. 2016), this study is the first to identify how relational conflict impacts women's access to social support and their subsequent reentry experience.

The final element of Chapter 3 pertains to racial differentiation in network tie-complexity. While White women did experience tie-complexity, they were more likely to end a relationship or keep a relation at arm's length, opting to have more supportive relations in their core support network. Black women, however, demonstrated substantial loyalty to their nuclear family, with every Black woman in the sample striving to maintain a close relationship with their parents and siblings.[20] Thus, Black women's relationships often had the most extreme spectrum of tie-complexity; on one hand, they reported far closer, more idolizing relationships with their family. On the other, they were

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[20] This statement excludes the mature Black women whose nuclear family had passed away prior to their interview.

treated with far more stigma and judgment from their family than White women. This relationship strain experienced by Black women had substantial impacts on their reentry, as they were more isolated, had more restrictions, and had worse mental health than their White counterparts.

Last, Chapter 4 explored how women's social support network composition, access to support, and reentry needs varied across life stages (emerging adult, mid-adult, and mature adult). I find that mid-life women's experiences most closely align with past reentry research (Kirk and Wakefield 2018), as they struggle with the more "classic" collateral consequences, such as quality housing, building their careers, advancing their education, and mothering. Moreover, mid-adult women have the most diverse social networks, which fall most closely in line with studies on women's network composition during reentry (Goodson 2018; Reisig, Holtfreter, Morash 2002; Valera et al 2015). While mid-life women align with past work, early and later-life women's experiences sharply diverge from our understanding of women's reentry.

Young women are far less prepared for independent living and lack the emotional maturity of women in later life stages, which placed them in a particularly vulnerable position during reentry. While middle and older life women often had clear directions and goals for their future, emerging adult women were preoccupied with learning the basic skills of being an adult. This made them heavily reliant on their parents and siblings for instrumental support and learning life skills, as many were not prepared to live on their own without guidance.

Later life women had the most life experience and felt their reentry was smoothed by their maturity and wizened outlook. Yet, they also experienced substantial barriers related to their age and length of time incarcerated. Indeed, mature women had difficulty with culture and technological shock after years of incarceration. Likewise, they struggled to return to careers they had been absent from for years, due to social capital and skills in their field growing dated. Their age made reintegration more difficult due to health issues, disability, and stigma against older adults. Later life women also were disadvantaged in their social networks, as many of their close supporters passed away or lost contact with them during their prolonged incarceration. Because of this, older women were far more likely to rely on formal support than younger women, as they often had no informal supporters remaining in their network when they returned to the community. In all, this chapter highlights the importance of considering the nuances of life stage when assessing women's needs during reentry.

Policy implications

Understanding women's access to social support during reentry, the role social support plays in their reentry experience, and how this varies across the intersection of relationship quality, age, and race has substantial policy implications. Beginning with formal support, this study identifies fundamental issues in the current availability of formal support for women during reentry. Namely, most women felt their parole officer often did nothing to support their reentry. Attention should be given to understanding why most parole officers fall short of expectations, be it too great of caseload, burnout, lack of funding, or insufficient training. Given most women in the sample did not pre-

establish their reentry resources while still incarcerated due to the assumption their parole officer would link them with these resources, to improve women's reentry experience parole officers either need to do more to support their clients or prisons need to make a concerted effort to connect women with services prior to their release.

Promising within-prison efforts to improve women's access to formal social support during reentry include the following: 1) Education on what types of reentry programs and resources are available to women during release and how to apply to receive this support. 2) Increasing in-prison programs facilitated by reentry program staff to foster women's social capital among reentry programs. 3) Increasing programs and opportunities that encourage incarcerated women to become more integrated with each other, as they can further share information on reentry resources and network peers with program staff. By establishing women with formal reentry resources prior to release, not only will their reentry transition be eased through formal means; it will also place less strain on their informal social support network, which may ultimately increase the informal support they receive (Willgning et al. 2016).

Turning to informal support, by understanding which women are at greater risk of not having access to informal social support, programming can better target those most in need of assistance. My findings suggest it would be particularly helpful to identify if women have nuclear family members they would be comfortable depending on for support, as these members most consistently meet women's basic subsistence and housing needs immediately upon release. Further, given that different types of relationships provide alternate forms of social support, women with diverse members in

their social support network will likely have access to more varieties of social support, thus getting more of their needs met. Therefore, women whose social networks are more limited, such as emerging adult women and mature women, may need more formal support to supplement the deficits in informal support variety, especially emotional and informational. In addition, women who indicate having relational conflict with one or more of their key reentry supporters should be prioritized for receiving formal mental health support during reentry.

Beyond identifying what reentry programs are most central to connecting women with prior to their release, in-prison programming can also work to improve women's access to informal social support. This is especially important, as reentry programs may have limits on the amount of assistance and resources they can provide. Moreover, with women expecting their family to be central to their reentry, the disappointment of their failing to provide support when needed can raise women's risk of recidivism (La Vigne 2009). Interviews suggest one avenue for improving women's access to informal support is encouraging frequent visitation and communication between women and members of their support network, as women who were regularly visited reported better-quality relationships with the visiting tie and less strain at relying on them during reentry. Second, given the frequent occurrence of relational conflict among women and their support network, both women and their families would benefit from communication and emotion regulation programming and conflict resolution counseling prior to their reentry reunion.

The evidence I present pertaining to Black women's access to social support and tie-complexity has marked implications for their needs and vulnerabilities during reentry.

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Notably, with the intersecting disadvantage of oppressed racial and gender groups, Black women are already faced with a more difficult reentry experience than other social groups (Brown 2010). They are also seven times as likely to be exposed to the justice system than White women (Brown 2010) and face a higher risk of recidivism (Huebner, DeJong, and Cobbina 2010), yet the impact of this intersectionality is often overlooked in criminal justice research. I present stigma as one mechanism through which Black women's reentry is made more difficult.

In reviewing the work on how justice-involved people internalize and are impacted by stigma, a common theme emerges that Black Americans feel less stigmatized by their convictions than Whites. Indeed, Black Americans report less fear of stigmatization than White Americans (Moore, Stuewig and Tangney 2016). Supporting this, Blacks are less likely to hide their criminal histories from the community, whereas Whites are more averse to receiving this label (Winnik and Bodken 2008). Scholars argue that the reason justice stigma impacts justice-involved Black persons to a lesser extent than Whites is because they already faced routine discrimination by White society members due to race prior to their justice involvement (Griffin and Evans 2021; Winnik and Bodken 2008). Though these studies do include women, the effect of gender is not considered. Moreover, work on the stigma internalized by Black justice-involved persons focuses on the stigma experienced by society at large, rather than their own communities.

Counter to the above research, in Chapter 3, I identify that stigma stemming from incarceration is highly prevalent in the family and community of Black women. This oversite is of particular concern for the well-being and reentry success of Black women,

as perceiving high amounts of stigma prior to and during reentry can limit women's successful reentry (McKendy and Ricciardelli 2021; Moore et al. 2016). Further compounding the consequences of stigma faced by previously incarcerated Black women, rejection due to membership in a stigmatized group fosters anxiety and lack of trust in others (Mendoza-Denton et al. 2002). Justice-related stigma can also heighten recidivism by functioning as a self-fulfilling prophecy, as being branded as a criminal can alter self-conception and access to conventional opportunities (Paternoster and Iovanni 1989). Unsurprisingly, fear of this stigmatization can encourage women to hide their justice involvement, which can lead to self-isolation, social avoidance, and feeling "othered" (Gålnander 2020; McKendy and Ricciardelli 2021).

When considered in conjunction with my findings on tie-complexity in Black women's support networks, it becomes apparent that Black women are uniquely vulnerable to social network restrictions and poor mental health during their reentry. Supporting this, nearly half of Black women on parole experience clinical depression, which can be moderated by emotional, informational, and instrumental social support (Malcome et al. 2019). However, as I demonstrate, Black women often have less access to emotional support due to their tie-complexity and the stigma they face from their family and community. Likewise, though they often do depend on the nuclear family for instrumental support, this often is detrimental to their mental health due to the substantial relationship complexity Black women experience with their supporters. Thus, my results suggest that tie-complexity is a key reason behind the high rates of poor mental health among Black women during reentry. Justice stigma may also further exacerbate their

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poor mental health by restricting women's willingness to seek formal emotional support and mental health counseling (Chapter 3; Cheng, Kwan, and Sevig 2013).

Black women's strained mental well-being during reentry was shown to have negative effects on their reentry more broadly, as many of their decisions were dictated by stigma. For example, Black women discussed fear of reintegration due to anticipation of additional stigma from their community. This prevented women from seeking employment, making friends, attending church, applying to higher education, living independently, and even leaving their houses. Limited work supports these findings, noting that unemployment and low rates of higher education among justice-involved persons can be in part attributed to fear of rejection due to stigma preventing them from applying in the first place (Apel and Sweeten 2010; Uggen and Stewart 2015).

Efforts need to be made to improve the circumstances of Black women's reentry. This study suggests multiple avenues for this. First, to reiterate my point above, improving the variety and volume of reentry programs available to women during reentry and making sure women are informed of these resources would help Black women not be so dependent on complex ties that negatively impact their mental health. One caveat to this approach is that some Black women were resistant to receiving formal support, particularly if they were attempting to hide their justice involvement. Thus, while this option may improve circumstances for some Black women, others would still be disadvantaged. Another option would be counseling for women and their families to rebuild their relationships and reduce stigma-based tie-complexity. Multiple Black women in the study wished there was a program to teach their families about justice

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involvement, the consequences of stigma, and how to best support them. They also felt training in healthy communication would be beneficial for all parties. Related, Black women further noted they would benefit from an in-prison program that teaches them coping skills for dealing with the stigma they would experience from their family and community, so they would have emotional resources to help them reintegrate into a difficult environment. This was particularly requested by emerging adult Black women, as they felt they did not have the emotional intelligence needed to appropriately navigate hostile elements of their relationships.

Across life stages, women described substantially different barriers to reentry, suggesting policy and reentry programming needs to be tailored to the varied needs of women at different ages. Beginning with the earliest life stage, emerging adult women often return to the community after incarceration without having lived on their own, leaving them with little to no independent living experience. Further, young women's social development was also interrupted by incarceration, limiting their formation of needed social and emotional intelligence. Last, having been in prison during their formative adult years, early-life women were unestablished in their careers and unclear on future goals. Thus, the most beneficial interventions for emerging adult women are programs that teach them skills in independent living, emotion regulation and coping, communication, and future planning (See also, Altschuler 2004).

By understanding who young women depend on, we are also able to readily identify which emerging adult women are most vulnerable during reentry. Recall that young women rely heavily on their parents or parental-acting siblings, yet these very

relationships are the most likely to have tie-complexity. Moreover, early adult women were less likely to have other diverse roles in their support network, such as friends or romantic partners. Thus, emerging adult women are at the highest risk of having limited access to certain types of social support, including emotional, appraisal, and non-life skill-related informational support. Moreover, they also present the worst mental health of any life stage due to the heightened tie-complexity in their networks. This was particularly robust among young Black women. With more difficulty forming relationships than the other life stages and the least understanding of formal support resources, emerging adult women who do not have a close nuclear family to rely upon likely experience more difficult reentry and thus a have a higher risk of recidivism.

Mid-adult women were highly independent but struggled to achieve their prosocial goals and landmarks of their life stage, such as a high-skilled career, advanced education, quality living situation, financial stability, and their children living with them. This was largely due to mid-life women being rejected from opportunities related to the stigma of having a criminal record and policy restrictions preventing them from receiving certain credentials for work or education.[21] Thus, policy aimed at reducing barriers to employment, housing, and education for those with felony records would significantly improve the circumstances of women in mid-adulthood. Another aspect unique to this life stage is motherhood. The greatest concern for mothers was the additional financial cost and emotional labor required of motherhood, yet this was often expressed as a minor

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[21] Women noted some social work credentials and programs (a field many aspired to build their careers in) prevented those still on parole or who had been convicted with a crime within a certain number of years from participating or receiving various certifications, which effectively paused their career trajectory.

element in their reentry experience. Past work suggests childcare is a point of difficulty for mothers during reentry (Arditti and Few 2006; Bonta, Pang, and Wallace-Capretta 1995; Ferraro and Moe 2003; Huebner and Pleggenkuhle 2015). Thus, though all women in this sample received sufficient childcare from their parents or the fathers of their children, it is important to acknowledge that in the event informal supports are not available to provide childcare, mid-adult women may experience greater time constraints that could limit their ability to work and complete parole requirements. Therefore, readily available childcare would also give mid-life women more opportunity during reentry. Last, while middle adult women quickly became self-sufficient, they often had more housing insecurity immediately on release relative to emerging adult women, as they felt they were too old to rely on their parents. To sum up, middle-life women need programs that support them with transitional living, stable housing, career building, pursuing higher education, and childcare. It would also support women in this stage to pass laws in support of reducing discrimination against people with a felony record by employers, landlords, and higher education institutions.

Concluding with reentry needs specific to mature women, the substantial erosion undergone by mature women's informal social networks during incarceration leads them to be the most heavily dependent on formal support relative to women in other life stages. Thus, priority should be given to securing formal support for later-life women during reentry. Particularly important forms of formal support include support needed for their basic survival, such as housing, medical, and financial support. Assistance in finding employment is also needed, though would need to be approached case by case depending

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on the extent of women's ability to work considering age and disability. Another issue unique to older women is technological and cultural shock, where mature women expressed struggling to catch up with current society. Thus, they would benefit from in-prison technological literacy programs, in addition to having access to current media to acclimate to the societal changes that occurred since their incarceration.

Limitations

This study is of course not without limitations. For a qualitative study, 20 interviews are sufficient to glean a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind women's social support during reentry. However, a small, qualitative sample is unable to make generalizable, causal statements. Additional factors that limit the generalizability of this sample are the higher-than-average education level (Nowotny, Masters, and Boardman 2016), low instances of familial justice involvement, and many first-time offenders. Given multiple women were incarcerated while attending university, combined with low instances of family justice involvement, women in this sample may come from more prosocial backgrounds than the average population of women in prison. This may heighten the tie-complexity experienced by women in this study due to stigma, lack of understanding, and the higher prevalence of Black respectability politics among prosocial families. Moreover, frequent recidivism can impact the formation and maintenance of social connections (Western 2018). As just over half of the sample had no prior justice involvement before their incarceration, women in this sample may have more avenues of

social support available to them than samples with women more frequently exposed to the justice system.

This study also included women released up to three years prior to their interview. While this allows for a prolonged picture of women's reentry experiences, it also has two shortcomings; 1) women's support networks may have changed in the years since their release, and 2) a potential selection effect. As we saw in Chapter 3 some women had cut ties with members of their original reentry support network, replacing them with different people by the time of the interview. Thus, the composition of role types (Parent, sibling, partner, etc.) in each women's social network may not resemble the makeup of women's networks immediately after release. That said, most women discussed the importance of their current network throughout their entire reentry journey. Moreover, the only women who knifed off ties with members of their core supporters removed an abusive partner, suggesting that change in women's networks during release may be limited to romantic partners. Turning to the potential selection effect, recidivism primarily occurs within the first few years of release (Pfaff 2017), meaning by including women who had successfully remained crime-free for multiple years, the study may have sampled a higher proportion of prosocial women than the general reentry population.

Another deficit in my data collection is my exclusive focus on women's top three support network and general questions about other supporters. It became clear in a few interviews that some women had extensive nuclear family networks (many siblings and household members), yet they often spoke only about the most supportive siblings. Not capturing women's entire family network may have obscured important elements of

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women's social networks and how they determine which network members to turn to for support. Subsequent research should endeavor to capture not only the most crucial social supports but also document the full extent of women's nuclear family and inquire as to why certain members are not nominated.

Future Research

This dissertation has produced several promising directions for future research on women's reentry and social networks after prison. First, the research questions I address would benefit from a longitudinal approach. Indeed, women discussed having expectations for formal and informal support while incarcerated yet provided social support often was less than or exceeded their expectations. Thus, it would be fruitful to establish women's assumptions of support and their current social network while incarcerated and compare it to the support they receive once released. Further, following up in subsequent years would give researchers a deeper understanding of which social support roles are more transient or permanent fixtures in women's reentry networks.

Regarding women's formal support networks, I identified that active work in prison to build connections with reentry programming staff is one key mechanism determining the extent and quality of formal social support women receive during reentry. This raises the question, why were only mature women able to build these connections? Some attributed it to their maturity giving them more forethought to plan their reentry ahead of time. This was supported by younger women mentioning they did little research on programs, expecting the system to match them with any programming

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needs. Other later-life women suggested they had more social skills and confidence needed to approach program facilitators, allowing them to build more social capital with community programs. Additional research should investigate what factors allow certain women to better integrate themselves with community programming prior to re-entry. Moreover, it would be beneficial to understand if most women's poor experience of reentry programming is due to their own lack of knowledge of available programs or intentional gatekeeping by reentry programs that have limited capacity to serve more than a few select women.

Methodologically, my research suggests important considerations to include in data collection and assessment. First, by breaking out the loose conception of the family into specific roles, I find that each type of family member provides differential forms and extent of support. Therefore, I demonstrate that considering social support from a singular family category obscures substantial nuance in the actual support women can access. Similarly, I find close friends provide similar levels of support as the nuclear family, yet distant friends provide little assistance. This sets the clear precedent that subsequent work must explicate the type of friendship women have to best ascertain the support available to them. Likewise, justice involvement history can also impact the variety of support that can be provided. Last, when recording the composition of women's social networks, it is important to consider the life stage of the sample, as having different life stages in the sample will bias the network composition. For example, romantic partners played a far more substantial role in the reentry of middle-life women. Thus, a study with only emerging adult women may underestimate the role romantic

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partners play, whereas a sample of exclusively middle-adult women may overestimate the proportion of women who rely on romantic partners during reentry.

Considering the age and maturity of study participants is also central to understanding women's unique needs during reentry. As demonstrated, most "classic" collateral consequences literature falls in line with middle-life women's experiences, which obscures the circumstances unique to younger and older women. Additional work is needed to further investigate the barriers specific to women in different life stages. Notably, this study asked women how their life stage impacted their reentry experience and needs but did not include more in-depth assessments of maturity and capabilities. It would be helpful to consider these questions through a quantitative lens that includes indexes on cognitive maturity, impulsivity, life skills, and social skills. This may be particularly helpful in identifying women's life stage and related collateral consequences, as I demonstrated women's age is not always predictive of their maturation and life stage.

Related, current research lacks a deeper understanding of how the years and maturation lost to drug use itself impact women's reentry experiences and needs. This study identified that for women who started using drugs during emerging adolescence, regular drug dependency can inhibit their ability to gain the life skills needed to thrive as independent adults. Further research is needed to investigate how chronic drug use is associated with markers of adulthood, including life skills needed to live independently, emotion regulation, and communication skills. In addition, researchers should ask what additional support women leaving prison with a long drug-use history need to aid them in transitioning into a successful independent living situation.

Consistent with past work, women were heavily reliant on other women for social support during their reentry (Cobbina 2010; Shollenberger 2009; Valera et al. 2015), including family, romantic partners, and friends. Of note, beyond social network size, social network composition greatly influences the quality and quantity of resources that can be attained through social connections (Huffman and Torres 2006). In other words, *who* is in your social network may matter more than how many people you know (Rucks-Ahidiana, Harding and Harris 2020; Western and Sirois 2019). Across social institutions, women are routinely disadvantaged, leaving them with less resources and social capital to share with other women returning to their community (Belknap and Holsinger 2006; Collins 2019; Desmond 2016; Glenn 1992; McCall 2001). Therefore, having a support network of predominantly other women may result in women having less access to instrumental support and social capital than men during reentry. Moreover, relative to men, incarcerated women have more chronic drug abuse histories (Bloom, Owen, and Covington 2005; Plugge et al. 2008), which may also leave their social networks diluted with less beneficial social connections. Thus, accessibility of resources through social networks during re-entry may not be equal across genders. Supporting this, women are more likely to rely on public housing for shelter due to limited informal social support, relative to their male counterparts (Baldry et al. 2006; Mallik-Kane and Visher 2008), and women's social supporters can struggle financially and emotionally support them (Willgning et al. 2016). Future research is needed to assess how access to social support and social capital during community reentry varies by gender.

The introduction of tie-complexity as a factor in women's receipt of social support also implicates future research. I find tie-complexity is common in women's networks during reentry and give initial insight into factors that can raise women's risk of complex ties in their support network. While this dissertation provides a helpful jumping-off point, there is much more to be discovered. Past work suggests women's interpersonal relationships have higher levels of conflict than men (Kreager et al. 2021; Opsal and Foley 2013; O'Brien 2001), which may lead to women having more tie-complexity during reentry than men. Comparative research across gender is needed to assess if this is the case. Given the more volatile nature of women's relationships, it is possible tie-complexity is another factor that makes women's reentry more difficult than their male counterparts. Furthermore, the commonality of tie-complexity suggests future research cannot limit the assessment to relationships that have exclusively "positive" and "negative" impacts on women's reentry.

Exploring racial differences in post-prison stigma is also relatively understudied. While there is a diverse body of work on how race impacts the treatment of justice-involved persons by social institutions such as employment, education, and housing, scant research unpacks how racial communities differentially treat their own members after justice involvement. Given this study found stark differences in the social relationships of Black women with their families relative to white women, additional research needs to delve deeper into what factors and cultural elements influence how Black families receive and treat their daughters after incarceration. With Black respectability politics' emphasis on the purity and obedience of Black women, it would

also be beneficial to consider if Black women experience more sanctions from their families than men. Last, with evidence suggesting Black women's larger community and church congregation influences their reentry and treatment by their family, future research should more deeply explore the role Black women's extended social networks play in their reentry experience, perceived stigma, and mental health.

In conclusion, this study advances our understanding of women's access to social support and the role social support plays in their reentry experiences. By illuminating the importance of informal social networks in the provision of social support and that different types of relationships provide varied extents and forms of social support, I have identified key policy and future research implications. Moreover, through exposing crucial differences in women's access to social support and needs during reentry across race and life stages, I highlight the importance of taking an intersectional approach to studying women's return to the community after incarceration.

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Appendix A: Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your age?

2. Which race/ethnicity best describes you? (Please select all that apply)
   a. American Indian or Alaskan Native
   b. Asian/Pacific Islander
   c. Black or African American
   d. Hispanic American
   e. White/Caucasian
   f. Other (please specify)

3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   a. Less than high school
   b. Some high school
   c. High School
   d. Some college, no degree
   e. Technical degree
   f. Associate degree
   g. Bachelor's degree
   h. Post-graduate/professional degree
   i. Other (please specify)

4. What is the total annual income of your household?
   a. $0-$24,999
   b. $25,000-$49,999
   c. $50,000-$74,999
   d. $75,000-$99,999
   e. $100,000-$124,999
   f. $125,000-$149,999
   g. $150,000-$174,999
   h. $175,000-$199,999
   i. $200,000 and up

5. Where do you currently live?
   1. With parents
   2. With partner

    3. With other family
    4. With friends
    5. Alone
    6. Transitional living facility
    7. Homeless
    8. Other_____

6. Is this a permanent (not short-term) living situation?
    Yes
    No
    Unsure

7. How long have you been living in your current living situation?

8. How many places have you lived since your release?

9. On a scale from 1-5, one being very unsatisfied and 5 being very satisfied, please rate how satisfied you are with where you are living.
    1. Very unsatisfied
    2. Unsatisfied
    3. Neutral
    4. Satisfied
    5. Very satisfied

10. On a scale from 1-5, one being very unsafe and 5 being very safe, how safe do you feel in your current living situation?
    1. Very unsafe
    2. Unsafe
    3. Neutral
    4. Safe
    5. Very safe

11. Feeling secure in your living situation means you feel at ease, comfortable, and not concerned with your living situation. On a scale from 1-5, one being very unsecure and 5 being very secure, how secure do you feel in your current living situation?
    1. Very insecure
    2. Insecure
    3. Neutral
    4. Secure
    5. Very secure

12. As far as you know, has either of your parents ever committed a serious crime that did, or would have, resulted in jail or prison time?

> 01 = Yes
> 02 = No
> 03 = Unsure

13. What month and year were you released from prison?

14. How long were you incarcerated for?

15. How many times have you been incarcerated (including juvenile corrections)?

16. Are you currently under PRC or parole supervision?

17. Do you have a history with drug use?

> Yes
> No

18. IF 16=YES, are you participating in any addiction recovery services?

19. How many children do you have?

> a. 0
> b. 1
> c. 2
> d. 3
> e. 4
> f. 5+

20a. If 19>0, What are the ages of your oldest and youngest children?

20b. (if a mother) Do you have custody of your children?

> a. Yes
> b. No

20c. If 20b=NO, are you currently trying to regain custody?

20d. (if a mother) Who cared for your children while you were incarcerated?

21. Are you currently married or involved in a romantic relationship?

> 01 = Yes
> 02 = No

22a. if 21=YES, what is the gender of your partner?

22b. IF 21=YES, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, how would you describe the quality of your relationship with your romantic partner?
     01 = Poor
     02 = Fair
     03 = Good
     04 = Very good
     05 = Excellent

23. If 21=NO, do you have a non-romantic household partner?
     01 = Yes
     02 = No

23a. if 23=YES, what is the gender of your partner?

23b. IF 22=YES, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, how would you describe the quality of your relationship with your non-romantic partner?
     01 = Poor
     02 = Fair
     03 = Good
     04 = Very good
     05 = Excellent

Now I'm going to ask you a couple questions about your history with abuse. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you may skip these questions.

24A. As an adult, did you experience physical or sexual assault from a family member?
     1=Yes
     0=No

24B. As an adult, did you experience physical or sexual assault from a romantic partner?
     1=Yes
     0=No

24C. In the 12 months prior to your incarceration, did you experience any physical or sexual abuse from your family or romantic partner?
     1=Yes
     0=No

24D. As a child, did you experience physical or sexual assault from a family member?
     1=Yes
     0=No

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Justice Involvement History and Experience of Release

1. Can you please describe your first experience with the criminal justice system?
2. What has your criminal justice involvement looked like since then?

Social Network

The bulk of this interview will focus on your social network, or the people in your life. To start, I'd like to learn a bit about your relationship history with the important people in your social network.

3. Who in your family have you been closest to in your life, and how did your incarceration affect those relationships?
4. Can you tell me a bit about your relationship with your partner or very close friends? Have they changed or remained the same throughout your relationship?
   a. How did incarceration impact these relationships?
5. Is there anyone else who is important to your social network we have not yet discussed? If so, can you please tell me a little about your history?

Now I'd like to ask you about who in your life has played a role in your transition to the community. For this study we will define "support" to mean emotional support, financial support, resource support, and informational support. Resource support means helping with non-financial resources, like transportation or connecting you with people who can help you. Informational support means helping you with information, such as how to write a cover letter or apply for school. As we talk about the role the people in your life plan for your re-entry, please identify what types of support you got from them.

6. Since your release, who are the top three people you used as supports (role)?
   a. What kind of support did they provide?
   b. Why do you think these people were so supportive?
   c. Are these the three the people you expected would be your best supports?
7. What relationships challenged your reentry efforts?
   a. How?
8. Was there anyone you sought support from who did not give you the support you needed?
   a. Why do you think this person did not provide support when you asked?

9. Was there anyone you thought would provide support, but you did not feel comfortable asking them for help? If so, please explain why you had reservations.
10. (If abuse history was disclosed in survey) How has your history of abuse with your family and/or partner impacted your reentry efforts?
11. (If in addiction recovery services) Have you received support from addiction recovery services that you were unable to receive from your personal social network (partner, family, friends). If so, what did this look like for you?
12. Has anyone in your social network (friends, family, partner) made staying crime free and/or sober more difficult? If so, in what ways has their behavior made this difficult for you?

Living Situation on Release

Now that I know a bit about your social relationships, I'd like to learn more about your current living situation.

13. Can you tell me a bit about where you are living now?
    a. Can you tell me about the positives and negatives of your living situation?
    b. What factors influenced your decision to live in your current residence?
    c. You mentioned feeling secure/insecure in in your current living situation earlier. Can you tell me a bit about what makes you feel that way?
    d. You mentioned feeling safe/unsafe in in your current living situation earlier. Can you tell me a bit about what makes you feel that way?

Work and Finances

Next, I'd like to talk about work and personal finances.

14. Do you currently have a job?
    a. **IF YES,** what is the job and roughly how many hours a week do you work?
        i. Did anyone you know help you get this job? If so, how?
        ii. Was it difficult to find this job?
        iii. What barriers, if any, did you encounter when looking for this job?
        iv. Are you happy with your current job?
            1. Why or why not are you happy with your current job?
    b. **IF NO**, do you have plans to get a job?
        i. What types of jobs would you want?
        ii. Have you been actively searching for a job?
        iii. What barriers have you encountered when looking for a job?

  iv. What strategies have you been using to look for jobs? This could include job search websites, friends and family, temp. agencies, etc.

15. (If they have an addiction history indicated in survey)- Can you please tell me about your addiction history?
16. Are you currently sober, and if so, how long have you been sober?
17. Since your release, is there anything you worry might affect your sobriety?
18. Can you tell me about what it has been like moving back into the community after being released form confinement?
19. What challenges did you face that were especially difficult when first leaving prison?

Closing Comments

20. How has your age or life stage has impacted your re-entry experience? Life stage can include marital status, motherhood, health, maturity, and life experience.
21. Did anything you learned or experienced in prison such as job-training, educational opportunities, counselling make re-entry easier? Can you list/describe these?
22. Is there something in prison that you wish you would have received to make re-entry easier?
23. Do you think being released during the Covid-19 era impacted your experience of reentry, such as who you could turn to for social support, or finding housing and employment? If so, please explain.
24. If you had to pick one thing you wanted the outside world to know about what life is like leaving prison as a woman, what would it be?

Thank you very much for time. The information you provided will help shed light on the needs of women who have been previously incarcerated.

Table 2. Respondent Profiles, n=20

Pseudonym	Race	Age	Life Stage	Education
Gloria	Black	73	Later	Some College
Fayth	Black	58	Later	High School
Monique	Black	28	Middle	Some College
Theresa	White	24	Early	Some High School
Kristin	White	32	Middle	Some College
Carmen	Hispanic	25	Early and Middle	Associates
Jada	Black	33	Middle	Some College
Cammy	White	33	Middle	Associates
Adeline	White	28	Early and Middle	Some College
Laura	White	38	Middle	Some College
Imani	Black	26	Middle	Bachelor's Degree
Laila	Black	26	Early	Associate degree
Lori	White	57	Later	Associate degree
Gabrielle	Black	28	Middle	Bachelor's Degree
Kiara	Black	21	Early	Some College
Latasha	Black	47	Later	Bachelor's Degree
Tia	Black	20	Early	Some College
Trisha	White	45	Later	High School
Amy	White	45	Early and Later	Some College
Savanah	Black	23	Early	High School