Check for updates

Article

Narrating Mother Identities From Prison

Feminist Criminology
2019, Vol. 14(5) 519–539
© The Author(s) 2018
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/1557085118773457
journals.sagepub.com/home/fcx
SAGE

Beth A. Easterling[1], Ben Feldmeyer[2], and Lois Presser[3]

Abstract

Incarcerated mothers face challenges to mothering in prison, including restricted opportunities to perform parenting tasks, ambiguous loss, and a compromised parenting identity. This study uses interviews with incarcerated mothers in the United States to explore how such women negotiate motherhood. All of the women grappled with how to care for their children from prison and projected futures that they hoped to experience as mothers. They varied in their active involvement as decision makers and in their intimacy with their children, but all were seen as renegotiating narrative identities. The study underscores the fact that social actors can be creative with self-narrative when they can be creative in few other ways.

Keywords

female inmates, mental health, qualitative research, ambiguous loss, incarcerated mothers, narrative identities

Beginning in the 1980s, the United States embarked on a project of mass incarceration. Although American imprisonment rates slowed after 2006, they have remained well above pre-1980 levels, with more than 1.5 million people in state or federal prison at year end 2015 (Carson & Anderson, 2016). Whereas women have always represented a minority of the nation's prisoners, between 1980 and 2014, their numbers in prison increased by more than 700% (The Sentencing Project, 2015). The prison boom has created a variety of consequences for both inmates and their families, as growing numbers of parents and particularly growing numbers of mothers were incarcerated.

[1]Mary Baldwin University, Staunton, VA, USA
[2]University of Cincinnati, OH, USA
[3]The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, USA

Corresponding Author:
Beth A. Easterling, Criminal Justice Program, College of Business and Professional Studies, Mary Baldwin University, 101 E Frederick Street, Staunton, VA 24401, USA.
Email: beasterling@marybaldwin.edu

Most women in prison are mothers, and the majority of mothers in prison have children below 18 (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). We know that maternal incarceration has far-reaching effects, in many cases triggering termination of parental rights (Brown & Bloom, 2009; Reed & Reed, 1997) and contributing to mental illness (e.g., depression) on the part of both incarcerated mothers and their children (Enos, 2001; Golden, 2005; Imber-Black, 2008; Poehlmann, 2005), worsened socioeconomic disadvantage for children (Allard & Greene, 2011), and strained familial relationships (Celinska & Siegel, 2010; Foster & Hagan, 2013; Hoffman, Byrd, & Kightlinger, 2010; Maruna, LeBel, & Lanier, 2004). Prior research on the topic has generated knowledge about *what* happens to mothers and families during incarceration—that is, the effects of imprisonment for mothers and/or their children—but has devoted less attention to *how* mothers negotiate parenting from prison, which is the focus of the current study.

Incarcerated women are likely to have experienced serious hardships such as mental health problems, substance abuse, low levels of education, lack of job skills (Imber-Black, 2008), and social isolation (Siegel, 2011) even before entering prison. Relatedly, many incarcerated mothers experienced stigma as "bad mothers" before incarceration, which is only compounded afterward (Siegel, 2011). Incarceration presents a unique set of challenges that often requires women to renegotiate their efforts and identities as mothers. Mothers in general are subject to gendered expectations related to mothering—expectations of selflessness, chasteness, and virtue. Criminal justice involvement violates these gender stereotypes and tarnishes societal ideals of what characterizes a "good mother" (Enos, 2001). Incarceration creates physical separation from, and substantial barriers to, communication with one's children, which challenge mothering even more (Clement, 1993; Snyder, Carlo, & Coats Mullins, 2002). Without consistent contact, mothers often experience strain and uncertainty concerning their relationships with their children and their identities as mothers. Despite these problems, several studies suggest that they continue "staking their claim as mothers" (Barnes & Stringer, 2014, p. 19). They do not abandon their parenting identities but are forced to redefine what it means to mother behind bars (Easterling & Feldmeyer, 2017; Enos, 2001).

Although research on the topic is scarce, at least three studies (Easterling & Feldmeyer, 2017; Enos, 2001; Rowe, 2011) explore the way that mother identities are shaped by incarceration. Enos (2001) explores ways in which women construct and manage motherhood while incarcerated, as well as how incarcerated mothers maintain relationships with their children. With a focus on race and ethnicity, Enos uses participant-observation and interviews within a prison over three years to explore mothering behind bars. She finds that inmate mothers work to "construct and maintain mother positions and performance under considerable stress" (p. 34), largely through strategies of managing caretakers and demonstrating mothering abilities while separated from their children and simultaneously balancing motherhood with crime and drug abuse. Enos (2001) further identifies four "career trajectories" of incarcerated mothers which reflect variation in the ways incarcerated mothers perform their mothering roles throughout the incarceration process: motherhood accepted (roles increase throughout and after incarceration), motherhood terminated (roles decrease throughout and after

incarceration), mother on leave (roles decrease during incarceration but increase after incarceration), and sporadic and shared mothering (roles vary and are shared before, during, and after incarceration) (pp. 132-134). Enos's work highlights that incarcerated mothers are not equally connected to their mothering roles before, during, or after incarceration. Although her work acknowledges motherhood identity maintenance for incarcerated mothers, her trajectories are more focused on their performance of mothering. Our work builds on hers by focusing on the mothers' narrations of such performance, and on their *sense* of motherhood besides, while they are incarcerated.

Rowe (2011) suggests that wide variation exists in the impact of incarceration on women's identities as they employ different sets of coping strategies to deal with the hardships and stigma of being a woman in prison. Specifically, she finds that "reflexive management of self-meanings is a technology of the self, employed in response to the dislocation of imprisonment in order to cope with its painful and stigmatizing meanings" (p. 587). This stigma can be compounded for women who are mothers. Easterling and Feldmeyer (2017) approach the matter through a race lens, suggesting a "spoiling" effect on identity for white mothers from rural areas as well as their children. Consistent with Enos (2001), those findings suggest that the mother identity is threatened by both internal (personal feelings of guilt and shame) and external (community stigma) forces. Easterling and Feldmeyer's study (2017) also expands these findings to suggest that a small town background, for example where many members of a community are aware of a mother's crime, contributes to unique experiences of spoiled identity and stigmatization for incarcerated mothers.

Beyond these works, research has yet to fully explore identity work among mothers in prison as they navigate dual, competing roles as "mom" and "inmate." Hence, a site of agency among some of the most marginalized and oppressed persons in our society is overlooked. The current study seeks to address this gap in research using qualitative interview data gathered from 35 mothers in a women's prison in the southeastern region of the United States. Our research suggests that cultural pressures on mothers combined with the harsh realities of prison life set the stage for a unique sense of undefined, or *ambiguous*, loss among incarcerated mothers (see Boss, 1999). This loss includes both physical separation from their children and the psychological loss of their ability to mother in a traditional sense, which results in severe uncertainty about their place within the family during and after incarceration. To manage these strains, we find that incarcerated mothers revise their identities in line with one of three general identities: *same mom, modified mom*, and *suspended mom*. Findings suggest an active negotiation process using self-narratives to mold one's mother identity in response to the constraints of incarceration.

Mothering in Prison

Broadly speaking, motherhood in Western society has been constructed as natural and universal, with unrealistic expectations of good mothers as singularly devoted to that "noble calling" (Morash & Schram, 2002, p. 73). Women must make mothering the top priority in their lives; failure to do so puts the social order, not to mention families, at

risk. Notwithstanding the fact that the 20th century Anglo "cult of true womanhood" was a trap—a contraction of ways of being a person—it was, and arguably still is, a trap only available to affluent White native women. Racism and xenophobia put ideal mothering out of the tangible and symbolic reach of many, as does criminal justice involvement. Performing motherhood according to these ideals is exceedingly difficult for most women, even without the constraints of prison. Furthermore, this vision of motherhood largely discounts the socioeconomic challenges to parenting experienced by women in disadvantaged contexts, who also face greater risk of incarceration.

Once incarcerated, it becomes even more difficult to achieve dominant cultural expectations of motherhood as women confront both the structural realities and the stigma of prison (Cecil, 2007). Beckerman (1991) takes note of the latter, stating that an incarcerated mother "offends society's idealized vision of women as all-caring, nurturing, and attentive to their children. She therefore poses a threat to the established social order" (p. 172). In other words, incarcerated mothers are viewed as *unfit* mothers, and their crimes are seen as evidence of their inability to mother (Arditti, 2012; Beckerman, 1991; Morash & Schram, 2002). Where imprisonment is seen as indicating something essential about the inmate, a circumstance she has furthermore chosen, motherhood is conceived as incongruous with a prison sentence. She has detached from her children; she has not *been* detached from them.

In addition to encountering stigma, mothers in prison are separated from daily family life and experience a dramatic loss of power over their own lives as well as the lives of their children. Mothers lose day-to-day interaction with their children, who routinely experience a change in living situations once their mothers are incarcerated. Phone calls (which can be expensive) and visitation (with family often many miles away) can present unique challenges, making personal contact with incarcerated mothers and their children logistically difficult if not impossible. Siegel (2011) suggests that visits between mothers in prison and their children are infrequent, and some families never visit at all. In addition, the visits they do have can be emotionally and financially taxing due to distance, costs, strained relationships with caregivers, and prison restrictions, making it difficult to be active as a mother while incarcerated and to maintain positive connections (Arditti, 2012).

In light of both the stigma and practical constraints of prison, what emerges is a picture of double jeopardy for incarcerated mothers (Easterling, 2014). These mothers are viewed as a threat to "the moral conscience . . . by failing to meet proscribed standards of 'appropriate womanhood'" (Sharp & Ericksen, 2003, p. 121). They have violated gender stereotypes by committing crime, ideologically coded as masculine. In addition, they have shattered dominant expectations of motherhood due to their separation from the daily lives of their children, and thus, are deviant by societal definition. At the same time, mothers in prison are stripped of power and the ability to mother by conventional standards. Taken together, the loss of rights, power, and contact with children, combined with society's idealized vision of "good" mothering, challenges incarcerated women's ability to mother and their mother identities. This begs the question, how do women negotiate this separation from their children and the potential erosion of their mother identities?

Rowe (2011) suggests that women in prison are able to draw on roles and relationships beyond prison walls to help negotiate their prison identities. For example, incarcerated women can reference previous statuses held to help mitigate spoiled identity or power inequities while in prison to help maintain a more "positive" prison identity. Toyoki and Brown (2014) find that incarcerated men manage stigma in part by using narratives to create positive identities for themselves. For example, the authors conclude that, though incarcerated, most individuals in their study chose to tell self-narratives of being "temporarily derailed" or were actively controlling options for their overall identity, versus "end of the line" stories with no hope for the future. Ugelvik (2015) highlights stories told by male prisoners in which sex offenders are conjured as evil, the narrator emerging as decent by comparison. It is likely that incarcerated mothers rely on similar discursive strategies to manage stigma and challenges to their identity.

From narrative psychology comes the broad view that stories are vehicles of identity construction (Bruner, 1986 Somers, 1994). We forge our sense of self in the context of stories. The concept of role takes on a different meaning in this perspective, as a character in a story rather than a constellation of qualities and responsibilities. We pursue a culturally inscribed role as the protagonist of an internal story of self that we are constantly revising.

Within criminology the notion of narrative identity has inspired scholarship on both harm-doing (Presser, 2009, 2013) and desistance (e.g., Maruna, 2001). The active process of identity (re)formation can help incarcerated mothers empower themselves *and* find meaning in the loss of their children and conventional mothering. Yet, as described in the next section, the sense of loss triggering this process is often an "ambiguous loss" that carries tremendous uncertainty, in turn complicating the experience of meaning making and role strain for mothers in prison.

Ambiguous Loss of Family Relationships in Prison

The theory of ambiguous loss provides a useful framework for understanding mothers' experiences in prison. This theory describes the sense of loss that an individual feels when a family member is physically present but psychologically absent (e.g., in the case of Alzheimer's disease), or vice-versa, when a family member is psychologically present but physically absent (e.g., in the case of divorce). The events triggering ambiguous loss are often unique in that they provide little closure. In these situations, a person's relationships have changed and are often uncertain. Part of a given relationship may be lost, but other parts remain intact and this contradiction can be confusing. As such, ambiguous loss may be accompanied by a host of negative psychological responses, including depression, anxiety, sleeping difficulties, and feelings of guilt and shame (Boss, 1999, 2004, 2006).

A small but growing body of research suggests that ambiguous loss is commonplace for whole families while parents are incarcerated (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003; Bocknek, Sanderson, & Britner, 2009; La Vigne, Davies, & Brazzell, 2008). For example, in a sample of first through 10th graders, Bocknek and colleagues (2009) found high levels of stress and a poignant sense of ambiguous loss

among children with a parent in prison. Similarly, Arditti (2012) suggests that traumatic separation and disenfranchised grief, which can result in a host of negative psychological responses, may be typical for families experiencing the unique ambiguous loss associated with a family member's incarceration.

Several recent studies on maternal incarceration suggest that mothers in prison experience a particularly pronounced sense of ambiguous loss. For example, Easterling (2014) finds that mothers in prison are faced with a sense of uncertainty about their relationships with their children, both during and after incarceration. They have minimal opportunities to engage with children while incarcerated, which can create confusion in their roles as mothers. As a result, they may experience intense shame and negative feelings for being a mother but violating the ideals of motherhood because they are behind bars (Arditti & Few, 2008; Easterling, 2014; Maruna et al., 2004).

As highlighted above, the theory of ambiguous loss holds promise for describing the experiences of mother in prison. However, substantial questions remain about *how mothers respond to and negotiate this sense of loss*, and furthermore, the implications such efforts carry for incarcerated women, their families, and for future social reentry and reintegration.

To address this gap in research, the current project explores how incarcerated mothers construct mother identities. As we describe in the following sections, one of the reasons mothers struggle to negotiate parenting from prison is due to the ambiguous sense of loss they experience in relationships with their children and the general absence of assistance in dealing with their new roles and circumstances. We discern three types of self-claims on motherhood among incarcerated mothers: (a) *same mom*, (b) *modified mom*, and (c) *suspended mom*.

Research Methods

Interviews for our project were conducted at a state women's prison in one southeastern state. The institutional capacity of the prison was 713, with 672 inmates being held at the time of interviews. The majority (85%) of inmates were White, and the median age was 34 years. In contrast, the statistics for incarcerated women in the United States overall during 2011 were approximately 49% White, with more than 60% of female inmates that were age 39 or younger (Carson & Sabol, 2012). Approximately 33% of the prison's inmates were incarcerated for violent crimes, 30% for drug-related offenses, 21% for fraud-related offenses, 13% for property crimes, and 3% for other/miscellaneous crimes. By comparison, among females incarcerated at the state level in 2011, approximately 36% were incarcerated for violent crimes, 25% for drug-related offenses, 29% for property crimes, and 9% for public order and other/unspecified crimes (Carson & Sabol, 2012). Thus, the demographics for the prison, particularly in terms of race, are not comparable with the wider U.S. population of female inmates, however, the crime profile is similar.

The first author interviewed a total of 49 women during February, March, and September of 2011. Thirty five of these interviews were conducted one-on-one, and the remaining 14 were conducted in group interviews involving 7 women each. For the

purposes of this article, we draw from the 35 individual interviews to glean in-depth details about their experiences. All of the women interviewed were mothers who had experienced incarceration while their children were below the age of 18, though some of the mothers had adult children at the time of the interview.

The title of the study, forged and advertised by the prison, was "Motherhood Research." Prison staff were in charge of the recruiting process. Once the study was advertised, with a brief description of the study that noted participants would be asked about their experiences being a mother in prison, residents of the prison were allowed to sign up, if interested. On the first day of research for each visit, women who had expressed interest attended an information session with the interviewer. Women were invited to ask questions at the conclusion of the presentation. Individuals still interested in participating signed up for time slots with prison staff. No reimbursement was given for participating.

The institution did not allow researchers to bring electronic recording devices into the prison. Instead, the interviewer wrote brief notes during each interview. Extensive notes were added at the conclusion of each day's interviews, and notes were transcribed into an electronic copy, totaling approximately 200 pages. Each woman (along with each family member described in the interviews) was given a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. The first author was the sole interviewer for this project. She received doctoral-level training in qualitative research methods, including interview techniques and ethical considerations, and met regularly with mentors, including both the second and third authors, to discuss the process.

The interviewer introduced herself and her project by connecting to participants as a woman and a mother. She shared some of her personal experiences as a mother as well as her prior research experience with families dealing with incarceration. The interview process relied heavily on feminist epistemology. Specifically, we worked from the assumption that viewing the social world from women's perspectives is uniquely informative. Incarcerated women in the United States are almost certain to have experienced intersectional forms of oppression, which allows them a unique perspective from which to understand such oppression and its complex consequences (Millen, 1997; Owen, 1998). We believed that the research participants grasped their present losses including identity challenges in superior ways, even if they did not use our academic terms. A phenomenologically informed approach (see Easterling & Johnson, 2015) was used to allow participants to take the lead in sharing and composing their stories. This method of interviewing was more structured than "pure" phenomenology, with multiple prompts and questions, but the goal was still to obtain an insider's perspective within the methodological and time constraints given by the prison authorities. Specifically, questions and prompts were aimed at clarifying what being a parent in prison meant for the mother, the child, and family life in general, from the perspective of the mother. Prompts included the following: Tell me about your life; How do you fulfill your parenting roles while incarcerated? Do you still feel like a mother? Do you feel that your role as a mother has changed? What does it mean to parent in prison? and Do you still feel attached to your children? Mothers were encouraged to elaborate on their answers and to provide examples of their experiences being a mother in prison. We were concerned not with objective facts *per se* but rather with women's perceptions of themselves and of how they negotiated motherhood while incarcerated.

After multiple, thorough read-throughs of the interview transcripts, the first author began an open coding process (see Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The transcripts were printed and broad themes were highlighted and tagged, including the three categories of motherhood identities and adaptations that ultimately formed the typology described here. A list of key terms was then developed for each theme or category and was searched within an electronic copy of the data. Through the coding process, three distinct types of identity shifts emerged from the mothers' descriptions of their experiences in maintaining motherhood while incarcerated, with specific dimensions that aligned with each of these categories. After identifying this typology, the authors worked collaboratively to ensure that participants were placed into the appropriate categories describing their experiences with mother identity, via the highlighted dimensions in previous rounds of analysis. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and any other individuals mentioned by participants and are utilized exclusively in our presentation of results.

Through the details and richness of the individual mothers' stories, we explore elements of ambiguous loss and the coping strategies mothers used—namely, stories to maintain motherhood (see Easterling & Feldmeyer, 2017)—to navigate that loss in relation to their mother identities within the typology.

Results

Incarcerated mothers find innovative ways to maintain a mother identity through stories of their past, present, and future as mothers. Our research participants reconstructed "motherhood" to fit the confines of prison life. Given the ambiguous loss of their mother identities, they recast themselves within storied identities.

Though all incarcerated mothers in our sample still considered themselves to hold the status of mother, they described their shifts in the mother role in three discernably different ways. We refer to these self-constructions around motherhood as (a) *same mom*—women who saw themselves as the same basic mother they were prior to incarceration; (b) *modified mom*—women who saw themselves as a different type of mother while in prison; and (c) *suspended mom*—women who saw themselves as disconnected from their motherhood roles and identities while incarcerated. This typology refers to the ways in which participants revised their mothering roles and thus their identities as mothers while incarcerated. Although the women in each of these three groups approached parenting from prison in different ways, they all described having to change the way they mothered. As we describe below, even the women who still saw themselves as the "same mom" were forced to question, (re)define, and often alter their roles and identities as mothers while in prison.

Same Mom

Seven of the 35 research participants fell into the "same mom" category. These mothers claimed that it was necessary to fulfill all or most of what they considered their "normal" mothering roles while they were incarcerated, even though they were often

unable to do so. The main characteristic used to categorize mothers as same moms is that they resisted changing their conceptions of motherhood during incarceration. Their self-narratives tended to be tragic, although discursive construction of one's steadfastness as a mother in many cases stabilized what could have been a heart-rending trajectory.

Renee: Holding on without contact. Renee, a 34-year-old mother of two sons, ages 10 and 14, lost all contact with her family when she entered prison. She received regular visits from family members at the county jail but had not had so much as a phone call or a letter (despite her frequent writing) during her time at the institution. Even though Renee had no contact with her family, she still had not changed the idea of what it means for her to be a mother. It was, she said, extremely difficult for her to handle the lack of communication with her family and the inability to fulfill any mothering activities for her youngest son, in particular. Renee did not *want* to change her perception of motherhood or her abilities to mother, even though she questioned whether or not her decisions as a mother were "right" even before she entered prison.

Renee was very emotional when talking about her youngest son, Chad. She was not as upset by the lack of contact with her oldest son, Simon, since she had not lived with him for some time before her incarceration. She was firm when explaining that although Chad was living with her sister at the time, Renee still maintained custody. She shared, "Everything in my life, in my mind, is Chad, Chad, Chad." She said she had no outlet and no one to talk to about her grief over loss of contact with her son, particularly when she felt that nothing should have changed.

The first author had the opportunity to interview Renee twice. Renee opened up even more during the second meeting, expressing her struggles with reconciling prison realities with her perception of what she should be doing as a mother. She was disgusted with mothers who, in her eyes, had detached from their children. She said,

> Some of the girls in here are ungrateful bitches. They never talk about their kids. They are always talking about tricks or girlfriends or getting money. They are so ungrateful. But if I could just have one letter or one phone call . . . I would be grateful . . . The girls here don't even talk about their kids. Am I missing something here?

Renee's emotions fluctuated from anger at other women to grief over her lack of contact with her son Chad. She contrasted herself with the "bad" moms who did not even talk about their children, portraying herself as a better mom because she could not give up her motherhood role, despite lack of contact with her children. The stark distinction from a negative other—a mythic bad mom who does not care—served Renee's good mom role. Renee was extremely distressed about the lack of contact with Chad and was unwilling to give up or reconsider her role as a mother while incarcerated, which resulted in a deep sense of grief.

Sharon: Frozen in time. Sharon is a 38-year-old mother of five children by five different fathers; four of her children were below the age of 18 at the time of her interview.

When she talked about her mothering responsibilities, she talked about them in the present tense, even though she had been in prison for over a year and had not seen her family in nearly a year and a half. She wrote letters to her children but said that sometimes they did not receive them. She did not speak to them on the phone. When asked about parenting in prison, she replied, "I don't whoop my kids. I do correct my kids." By speaking of her children from whom she had been separated for an extended period of time as if she were with them at the moment of the interview, Sharon constructed her mothering role as unchanged.

Sharon also talked about knowing that her children love her, miss her, and grieve over their separation. She said, "As a mother, I know how they feel." She said that her kids felt like they had to live with people they did not know and that she should still have been performing her parenting roles in person. Three of her minor children were with their fathers/stepmothers, and one was in a group home. She said she grieved over the physical loss of her children as well as her lack of emotional contact with them. She was adamant that her kids need both of their parents, and she was not giving up or changing her role as mother, "no matter what." Sharon was also interviewed twice, and during our second interview, she said that even though she was not with her children in person, she was still a parent; her kids already knew her rules and boundaries and followed them even in her absence. She said, "You're a parent and no one can take that away. You're a mother—your child is part of you, out of your womb." Such comments echo Enos's (2001) findings that incarcerated mothers claim motherhood through both biological and social ties. In Sharon's formulation, the fact of having birthed the child constructs a stable mother identity. Consistent with the theory of ambiguous loss, Sharon shared how difficult it was for her to be in prison because of the physical separation from her children, but psychologically she was still there and a part of their lives. She said that she had been "locked up" on suicide watch twice because she felt that she had no life without her kids. She said that being a mother was what defined her and felt that even while locked up, she should mother as she had done before. As a result, she felt that she had been "stomped on, beaten, and had my heart ripped out of my chest" because she saw the prison system as hindering her ability to mother.

Sandra: The need to hold on. Sandra is a "same mom," age 40, who became extremely emotional while talking about her two children, ages 9 and 13, during our interview. Her husband cared for them while she was incarcerated. She wrote to her children often, talked to them on the phone, and also had some visits with them. She enjoyed writing and talking, but visiting was emotionally difficult for her family. Specifically, visits with her children reminded her of how things *should be* the same, yet were not. Prison had upended her role as a mother and introduced a sense of ambiguous loss, which she and other "same moms" struggled to bear.

Sandra had not changed her perception of motherhood while incarcerated. Similar to Renee, she sharply distinguished herself from mothers who saw detachment from their children as acceptable. She argued that maintaining her mother role was beneficial to her rehabilitation: "People who never have anything to do with their kids and someone else is taking care of their children—they say they want to see their kids but they will just come right back here." Thus, she narrated a tragic story for other women.

In contrast, her bond with her family would prevent her from coming back to prison. She described herself as a "momma kitten," indicating a high level of maternal involvement, which she claimed was a crucial part of nurturing and being a good mother. Noting the difficulties of maintaining control over her children while incarcerated, she related having asked her husband to put their 13-year-old daughter on birth control pills, yet realized she could not force him to do so. The unyielding protagonist in this story ultimately had to yield, causing emotional strain. Sharon was adamant that she still maintained control of her children and struggled to reconcile her limitations while incarcerated with what she considered to be necessary aspects of her job as mother.

In sum, Sandra and the other "same moms" expressed an intense need to fulfill all or most mothering roles and were highly resistant to redefining motherhood while incarcerated. They claimed they were the only individuals who could adequately care for their children and that other caregivers were inferior, temporary substitutes. Same moms told a tragic story in which they attempted to remain the same mothers, but their carceral circumstances thwarted their ability to fulfill all that that role entails.

Lack of contact with children was also an impediment to the same moms' ability to redefine motherhood, as illustrated by Renee's story above. She was stuck in a kind of purgatory, unable to reconcile the past, present, or future. Her difficulties in defining herself as "mother" were indicative of the sense of ambiguous loss she felt. She was unsure of exactly what was happening to Chad on a daily basis, which was a source of great distress. For example, was someone else performing the mothering role that she felt she *should* be filling, even behind bars? Ambiguous loss theory notes that people experiencing this type of loss will seek clarity while simultaneously resisting information that could answer their questions due to the fear of the consequences of that knowledge (Boss, 1999). Same moms seemed to deal with this ambiguous loss by staying "frozen" in the past, either an actual or a romanticized time, where they really were fulfilling their expectations of mothering.

Modified Mom

Seventeen of the mothers align with the "modified mom" category. These mothers changed their conceptions of motherhood while incarcerated. Most modified moms had a contingent of social support, for themselves and/or their children, which allowed them to shift some of their mothering responsibilities to caregivers whom they trusted. Most decided not to take any part in disciplining their children while they were incarcerated, either because they themselves "did something wrong" or for logistical reasons, including limited contact with caregivers. They conceived of doing less while mothering. They also envisaged themselves as better mothers in the future.

Debra: Support to modify roles. Debra is a 35-year-old mother with three children, ages 2, 10, and 11 at the time of her interview. Her children lived with her husband and her parents. She received regular visits from her family, including dedicated bonding visits with her youngest child. Debra said that she was very grateful to have a close relationship with her husband and her parents, as they supported her and helped coordinate frequent visits.

Debra said that she was still able to fulfill some aspects of her role as a mother, but not to the extent that she had before incarceration. Debra felt that it was not fair for her to discipline her children while she was incarcerated. She shared,

> You can't be a parent in prison. You can but you can't. You can because you can listen, but you can't because you have to fall back on the caregiver—the caregiver has a lot of power and plays the roles in their daily lives . . . It's hard to be a mom for two hours.

Debra said she tried to do more listening and "cutting up" with her kids than anything else. She said she hoped to be able to jump back into her more traditional mothering role upon release and recognized that her visits and bonding time may help achieve that ultimate goal. But, during her incarceration, she said she had downgraded her role as a mother to listen and be a "sometimes" companion, without disciplining them or being especially active in their everyday lives.

Patricia: Power of caregivers. Patricia offers another example of a woman who redefined her role as a mother while incarcerated by allowing caregivers to fulfill part of that role in her absence. She is a 31-year-old mother of two sons, ages 8 and 13 at the time of interview, who was serving her second prison term for drug charges. She lived with both of her children prior to incarceration. While away, her oldest son's father was taking care of both of her children. Like Debra, Patricia did not attempt to discipline while incarcerated. Instead, she tried to talk her children through tough situations, but only if they chose to share those situations with her. She shared some specific instances of how she did not tell them right from wrong, like when her oldest son was smoking and she felt that she could not tell him to stop. She said, instead, that she offered her sons the opportunity to correct themselves independently. She felt that she was not able to "jump on them" because she herself ended up in prison. The caregiver should be the one correcting them, and she hoped that he was. Patricia did not tell the caregiver what to do while she was in prison, even though she had done so when her children visited him in the home prior to her incarceration.

Patricia stated that she had to change her role as mother because other people had taken on parenting responsibilities while she was away. The man who was serving as caregiver had a "new woman," and Patricia said that her sons did not like or respect her. They did not feel like they had to listen to her because she was not their mother. Yet, Patricia told her sons that this individual deserved their respect. Patricia shared that she must step back to allow her sons' father and his partner to parent during her incarceration.

Although Patricia had redefined what it meant to be a parent in prison, she was having difficulty figuring out exactly how to parent, and too, how she would renegotiate mothering once she got out of prison. She shared that she would try to start figuring out how to parent again while she was still incarcerated: She would

> try to set up goals and stuff . . . like school, their favorite color, favorite food, likes, dislikes, favorite toy, sports, movies. I will ask so I have a good idea what to do and what to expect when I get out.

Talking to her kids was key to this plan for change to regain more control as a mother.

Tanya: Generations of separation. Tanya, 36-years-old, had to redefine her roles as a mother *and* a grandmother while incarcerated. She had been in prison approximately 9 months at the time of our interview. She spoke of the different roles she was playing in the lives of her children and grandchildren. She said she had to accept that she could no longer control things in the daily lives of her family as she once did. Tanya shared that she was consumed with worry and uncertainty.

Tanya had two teenage daughters, Alicia and Tara, who were 16 and 18 at the time of our interview, and each daughter had a young child of her own, ages 2 and 1, respectively. Prior to incarceration, Alicia and the 2-year-old were living with Tanya, but Alicia had since obtained her own apartment. Tanya said that if she were home, Alicia would not be on her own. As she modified her mothering role while in prison, she spoke of having to accept such changes. Tanya's family lived 398 miles from the prison, and she did not get visits often, about once per month. She talked on the phone regularly, mainly to Alicia.

Tanya detailed the challenges of being a parent in prison. She emphasized issues of discipline, but in a different way than the other mothers in this sample. She concentrated on not wanting her 2-year-old granddaughter to be disciplined when she was not there. Tanya shared,

> I worry about them constantly. Especially with the grandbaby. I catch myself telling my daughter not to make the baby cry—telling her not to discipline. It hurts to see them cry. It's worse since I've been here because I don't know if they are okay or why they are crying—my first response is "What did you do to her?" Because I can't see her. I don't know.

Tanya recognized the disconnect between what she *wanted* to be able to do as a mother and a grandmother and what was *possible* from prison. Despite the fact that she wished she could still take care of Alicia and her child, she said she recognized that she must lower her expectations of herself given the distance between them; she needed to let Alicia parent on her own while she remained in prison.

Tanya not only changed her sense of herself as a grand/mother while she was incarcerated, but also she changed her perception of what she was going to do when prison life was behind her. She said the experience of incarceration had taught her to appreciate her children and grandchildren even more than she did before. As a result, she did not want to have to do the tough mothering—like disciplining—even after she left prison. Instead, she wanted to concentrate on "spoiling" her children and grandchildren to make up for lost time. She still spoke of herself as a caregiver but stressed the changes she had made and planned to make upon release.

To summarize, modified moms take the position that they can perform some roles as mothers but acknowledge that roles in general must change while they are incarcerated. Certain contradictions follow this change, stemming from the uncertainty and ambiguous

loss these mothers are experiencing. To deal with ambiguous loss, modified moms change the way they define their families and their roles as mothers within those families. As seen in other family crises related to ambiguous loss, boundaries within the family and customary roles and tasks become difficult to maintain, a shift that was readily apparent to modified mothers. For modified moms, motherhood itself, and especially the performance of discipline, must change during incarceration. These mothers searched for and held on to any way to perform some parenting roles while incarcerated. However, redefining and then practicing motherhood during incarceration was an evolving process. Modified moms constructed especially dynamic stories.

Suspended Mom

Eleven of the mothers were "suspended moms." They played minimal or no mothering roles during incarceration and changed their definition of motherhood to support this inaction. They cited a variety of reasons for their detachment: their children are grown; it was too difficult to think about their children from behind bars; they needed to focus on their own recovery; and they were unable to actively parent while incarcerated. Parenting logistics pertained, as only one mother in this category lived with all of her children prior to incarceration. The mothers in this group also cited difficulties in parenting prior to incarceration because of separation from their children. Interviews with suspended moms tended to be shorter than interviews with the other mothers, most likely because the questions centered around mothering, and these women did not consider themselves to fulfill many, or any, mothering roles while incarcerated. Nonetheless, all suspended moms still defined themselves as mothers during the interviews.

Holly: Personal priorities. Holly was a 36-year-old mother of two children, ages 11 and 14 at the time of her interview. Her brother and sister-in-law took care of her children while she was incarcerated. Whereas she and her children wrote to one another on a regular basis, their caretakers would not allow her children to talk with her on the phone, saying that she could talk to her children after she fully achieved sobriety. Holly's parents, who had a good relationship with her brother and sister-in-law, were also against her speaking to her children while incarcerated. Holly said that her parents still treated her like she was 10, and she conceded that she is not especially mature. Holly said she understood she needed to work on her own growth, including her recovery from drug addiction, before resuming greater intimacy with her children.

Holly did not feel that people can parent from prison, nor should they try to. She was serving her fourth prison sentence, this time on drug charges, and reflected on her previous various experiences as a mother behind bars:

> People try to parent from prison and it's just not effective. When I first went to prison, 10 years ago, my kids were younger. A lot of other moms try to parent from here. I tried to tell my husband to do this and that and how to fix my kids' hair that first time. But at the time, I had my priorities mixed up. In lieu of working on my drug addiction, I focused on what was going on at home. It robbed my kids' father of the opportunity to be a father.

This time, she was focusing on recovery and allowing her children's caregivers to do the daily parenting. Holly also indicated that her children would not live with her immediately following her incarceration. They will continue to stay with her brother and sister-in-law while she worked on staying sober in the free world. Holly expressed that she was content with that situation. While she was somewhat detached from her children at the time, Holly still considered herself a mother. She hoped to get counseling both individually and as a family when she got out of prison. Through counseling and taking reunification with her children slowly, she hoped to be a better mother who would not return to prison.

Bree:A focus on recovery. Like Holly, Bree described detaching from mothering roles to focus on recovery. At age 45, she had been incarcerated for five years of her 14-year sentence. She has three children who were all over the age of 18 at the time of the interview. Bree had a strong relationship with all of her children before her incarceration. She explained that when she was first incarcerated, her children were still minors. Her son, however, was the only one who lived with her. Her two daughters were already married so they lived with their husbands and children. Her son went into state care. Bree did not want to ask her mother to take custody of him because she was worried it would be too much for her to handle.

Bree said, "If you get caught up in free-world drama, it knocks you down." She said she felt disconnected from her free life in prison and was working to embrace that reality and build her life around it, since she had such a long sentence. She said that every mother has to find the right balance, but for her, separating from the free world seems necessary. She saw other inmates calling home every day and she thought that made things worse because no matter how much you talked on the phone, you were not really in your family's life while in prison. She said it was not only difficult on the women, but was also hard on the families on the outside. Thus, Bree performed care *through* detachment.

Bree said she was working on her "own" recovery, thus channeling the 12-step discourse of singular effort toward and responsibility for healing, community support notwithstanding. She said she thought being honest with herself was the way to do that. She had learned a lot during her time in prison and said she would like to help other mothers who have been in prison. She commented, "I think it could help for people to find positive parts of this instead of dwelling on the negative." Part of those "negative" parts was separation from one's children. She called it "disconnection" and said it was inevitable when you were incarcerated. During her first 18 months in prison, she said she tried to be a mom in the free world. She said, "But I liked to have drove myself silly" trying to do that. She disclosed that it was hard to accept the familial disruption, but using that time to work on herself—to deal with her addiction and how it hurt other people—was important if she was going to be good to her children after her release. To focus on yourself, Bree suggested letting go of what you could not control on the outside, including trying to be the mother you were before incarceration.

Carla and Jocelyn: Out of sight, out of mind. Suspended moms commonly cited the pain of thinking about what they could not do as parents as motivation to suspend their

motherhood role during incarceration. Carla (age 25) and Jocelyn (age 26), both mothers of two children, shared very similar stories, which concluded that thinking too much about their children and/or attempting to be active parents in their children's lives impeded their recovery and made the time apart even more difficult. Carla said that even when the caregivers sent pictures of her kids, she put them away and tried to block out thinking about them. She said, "It's sick. I think it's sick to think like that—to try and block your kids out. But if you think about what's going on outside of here, it will drive you nuts!" Jocelyn echoed these ideas: she said "out-of-sight, out-of-mind" was easier when it came to her kids. Yet, Jocelyn still wrote her children weekly to combat her fears that her children might think she had forgotten about them, and said she fully intended to jump into a mothering role after incarceration.

As these stories illustrate, "suspended moms" participated in minimal parenting during incarceration, but they still defined themselves as mothers. These women described past struggles against the idea that they could not parent, eventually arriving at the position that parenting was not possible during incarceration. As another detached mom, Claire, summarized during one of the interviews, "I don't see how you can parent in prison when you don't have a child to parent to."

These findings on suspended moms support Owen's (1998) insight that incarcerated women are often torn between dealing with their individual circumstances in prison and responsibilities to families in the free world. Strong connections to the outside world can complicate daily life for incarcerated mothers. Suspended mothers expressed the same types of pain and grief over the loss of their children and motherhood roles as did women in the other categories. Yet, they dealt with it by focusing on themselves and trying to block out thoughts about what was happening outside of prison—virtually the opposite of same moms. In their view, dealing with parenting responsibilities impeded their recovery. Suspended moms also exemplified a specific element of family crisis related to ambiguous loss: they were experiencing a shift in focus from the family to the individual. Instead of focusing on the family unit, they were drawn to focus on themselves. Most of these mothers were active in some fashion in at least some of their children's lives prior to incarceration. Having entered prison, they shifted their focus away from family, specifically mothering duties, and prioritized current concerns. Where they chose to focus on their recovery instead of parenting, they spoke of that choice as necessary to become *better* mothers post-incarceration. From suspended moms came a most radical maneuver—the redefinition of mothering itself.

Discussion

Imprisonment, among its other harms, provokes a sense of ambiguous loss among mothers as they experience separation from both their children and their role as mothers. Our qualitative research interviews suggested that women in prison revise their identities as mothers via three distinct narratives in which they are either same moms, modified moms, or suspended moms. Women across these groups conceived of motherhood as a central and defining part of their identity. All grappled with how to care from behind bars. All of the women looked to a better time of mothering in uncertain

futures. The stories they shared cast visions of motherhood. This is what stories can do—project meaning into the future, based on history and present circumstance as well as enculturated values and desires.

Our findings are similar to those of Enos (2001), suggesting that the mother identity must be reconfigured in various ways to maintain motherhood during and beyond the incarceration period, with special attention paid to navigating the mothering role both during and after incarceration. Prior work has also suggested that "identity work" is an expression of individual agency (Toyoki & Brown, 2014). Consistent with such research, the mothers in our sample used stories to exert control over their identities. Rowe (2011) comments that the process of "reflexive management of self-meanings is a technology of the self, employed in response to the dislocation of imprisonment to cope with its painful and stigmatizing meaning" (p. 587). This active process suggests empowerment by incarcerated mothers despite the stigmatized identities thrust upon them by the outside world. Although popular stories construct criminalized women as bad mothers (e.g., Linnemann, 2010), their own stories of self can do reconstructive work.[1] Related to agency is creativity. The variation in the stories told by the women in our sample demonstrates that negotiating the mother role is a creative act.

We note some methodological limitations of this study. First, as already stated, the sample was fairly homogeneous, and not representative of the overall women's prison population. Mothering from afar has additional layers of complexity for Black and other minority women, for whom children are at high risk of violence including violence at the hands of the state (see Sharpe, 2016). Not being able to protect one's child should cause particularly acute distress, and thus angle the issue of mother identity, though we cannot say how with this sample. Further research should be conducted with more heterogeneous populations. Second, the study was voluntary and was advertised by the prison staff as "Motherhood Research." Mothers who felt completely disconnected from their mothering roles very likely avoided participating. Also, some mothers who may feel deeply connected with their children and/or mothering roles may have chosen not to participate because sharing intimate details of their parenting experience while in prison may have been too painful or too personal to share with a researcher. Third, the prison itself dictated that each participant had only a short amount of time (typically less than one hr) to spend with the interviewer. More time would have allowed for more fully-fleshed out storytelling, and multiple meetings could have built a stronger relationship and trust between the participant and the interviewer that could have illuminated additional insights. The prison also barred us from audio-recording the interviews, which limited our ability to subject the interview data to fine-grained (e.g., discourse) analysis.

A conspicuous and purposive dimension of our methodology is, of course, its focus on women. Male prisoners also engage in stigma management, including via stories (Ugelvik, 2015). However, as we speculate on the applicability of our findings to men, we note that being "a good father" is not a culturally vital position for them in mainstream Western society. Still, men in prison are fathers (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008) and they are likely to suffer ambiguous loss as well, including some sort of identity threat concerning fatherhood on account of their incarceration. Future research should probe this possibility and its contours.

Our findings offer important insight into the experience of mothering from prison. An understanding of ambiguous loss among incarcerated mothers, and especially women's own knowledge about and ways of dealing with such loss, can and should inform interventions. First, incarceration itself should be questioned. The evidence mounts for the myriad and lasting ways in which people, including individuals, families, and whole communities, suffer from imprisonment. But, as the state continues to incarcerate, we must gear programs toward reducing inmate distress and improving parent–child bonds during and after imprisonment. We can imagine a peer instruction program specifically dedicated to (a) scrutinizing and redefining the role of mother from a critical, intersectionally feminist perspective, and (b) sharing concrete strategies for parenting in the present and future. In addition, educating practitioners about ambiguous loss and coping strategies used by mothers in prison could inspire them to develop formal policies as well as programs that improve future prospects for both women in prison and their families, as they negotiate the challenges of incarceration and reentry processes. For example, programs that encourage lengthier and more frequent contact between incarcerated mothers and their children might be beneficial for reducing role strain and ambiguous loss. Whereas traditional parenting roles would, unfortunately, still be strained, more frequent and intimate contact could allow relationships to be maintained or even to grow during imprisonment.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank the staff of the Kentucky Department of Corrections (KDOC) for their assistance with access for this project. (The findings presented here are those of the authors, and KDOC neither approves or endorses them.)

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Note

1. The gripping collection of stories in *Inside This Place, Not of It* is illustrative (Levi & Waldman, 2017).

References

Allard, P., & Greene, J. (2011). *Children on the outside: Voicing the pain and human costs of parental incarceration*. *Justice Strategies*. Retrieved from https://www.justicestrategies.net/sites/default/files/publications/JS-COIP-1-13-11.pdf

Arditti, J. A. (2012). *Parental incarceration and the family: Psychological and social effects of imprisonment on children, parents, and caregivers*. New York: New York University Press.

Arditti, J. A., & Few, A. (2008). Maternal distress and women's reentry into family and community life. *Family Process*, *47*, 303-321.

Arditti, J. A., Lambert-Shute, J., & Joest, K. (2003). Saturday morning at the jail: Implications of incarceration for families and children. *Family Relations*, *52*, 195-204.

Barnes, S. L., & Stringer, E. C. (2014). Is motherhood important? Imprisoned women's maternal experiences before and during confinement and their postrelease expectations. *Feminist Criminology*, *9*, 3-23.

Beckerman, A. (1991). Women in prison: The conflict between confinement and parental rights. *Social Justice*, *18*, 171-183.

Bocknek, E. L., Sanderson, J., & Britner, P. A., IV. (2009). Ambiguous loss and posttraumatic stress in school-age children of prisoners. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *18*, 323-333.

Boss, P. (1999). *Ambiguous loss: Learning to live with unresolved grief*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Boss, P. (2004). Ambiguous loss research, theory, and practice: Reflections after 9/11. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *66*, 551-566.

Boss, P. (2006). *Loss, trauma, and resilience: Therapeutic work with ambiguous loss*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

Brown, M., & Bloom, B. (2009). Reentry and renegotiating motherhood: Maternal identity and success on parole. *Crime & Delinquency*, *55*, 313-336.

Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.

Carson, E. A., & Anderson, E. (2016). *Prisoners in 2015* (NCJ 250229). Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved from http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=5869

Carson, E. A., & Sabol, W. J. (2012). *Prisoners in 2011* (NCJ 239808). Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved from https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p11.pdf

Cecil, D. K. (2007). Look beyond caged heat: Media images of women in prison. *Feminist Criminology*, *2*, 304-326.

Celinska, K., & Siegel, J. (2010). Mothers in trouble: Coping with actual or pending separation from children due to incarceration. *The Prison Journal*, *90*, 447-474.

Clement, M. J. (1993). Parenting in prison: A national survey of programs for incarcerated women. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, *19*, 89-100.

Easterling, B. A. (2014). Ambiguous loss, concrete hope: Examining the prison experience for mothers from an ambiguous loss framework. In Polizzi, D. & Brazwell, M. (Eds.) *Transforming corrections: Humanistic approaches to corrections and offender treatment*, 2nd Ed. Durham, NC: Carolina University Press.

Easterling, B. A. & Feldmeyer, B. (2017). Race, rurality, incarceration, and motherhood: Spoiled identity among rural white mothers in prison. *The Prison Journal*, *97*, 143-165

Easterling, B. A. & Johnson, E. I. (2015). Methodological challenges of qualitative research with vulnerable populations. *The Qualitative Report*, *20*, 1568-1677. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol20/iss10/1/.

Enos, S. (2001). *Mothering from the inside: Parenting in a women's prison*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Foster, H., & Hagan, J. (2013). Maternal and paternal imprisonment in the stress process. *Social Science Research*, *42*, 650-669.

Glaze, L. E., & Maruschak, L. M. (2008). *Parents in prison and their minor children* (NCJ 222984). Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved from http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/pptmc.pdf

Golden, R. (2005). *War on the family: Mothers in prison and the families they leave behind*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hoffman, H. C., Byrd, A. L., & Kightlinger, A. M. (2010). Prison programs and services for incarcerated parents and their underage children: Results from a national survey of correctional facilities. *The Prison Journal*, *90*, 397-416.

Imber-Black, I. (2008). Incarceration and family relationships: A call for systematic responses. *Family Process*, *47*, 277-279.

La Vigne, N. G., Davies, E., & Brazzell, D. (2008). *Broken bonds: Understanding and addressing the needs of children with incarcerated parents* (Research report for the Urban Institute). Washington, DC: Justice Policy Center.

Levi, R., & Waldman, A. (Eds.). (2017). *Inside this place, not of it: Narratives from women's prisons*. London, England: Verso.

Linnemann, T. (2010). Mad men, meth moms, moral panic: Gendering meth crimes in the Midwest. *Critical Criminology*, *18*, 95-110.

Maruna, S. (2001). *Making good: How ex-convicts reform and rebuild their lives*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Maruna, S., LeBel, T., & Lanier, C. (2004). Generativity behind bars: Some "redemptive truth" about prison society. In E. de St. Aubin, D. P. McAdams, & T. Kim (Eds.), *The generative society: Caring for future generations*, (pp.131-152). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Millen, D. (1997). Some methodological and epistemological issues raised by doing feminist research on non-feminist women. *Sociological Research Online*, *2*(3), 1-15. Retrieved from http://www.socresonline.org.uk/2/3/3.html

Morash, M., & Schram, P. J. (2002). *The prison experience: Special issues of women in prison*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Owen, B. (1998). *In the mix: Struggle and survival in a women's prison*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Poehlmann, J. (2005). Incarcerated mothers' contact with children, perceived family relationships, and depressive symptoms. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *19*, 350-357.

Presser, L. (2009). "The Narratives of Offenders." *Theoretical Criminology, 13*(2):177-200.

Presser, L. (2013). *Why we harm*. New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press.

Reed, D. F., & Reed, E. L. (1997). Children of incarcerated parents. *Social Justice*, *24*, 152-169.

Rowe, A. (2011). Narratives of self and identity in women's prisons: Stigma and the struggle for self-definition in penal regimes. *Punishment & Society*, *13*, 571-591.

The Sentencing Project. (2015). *Incarcerated women and girls*. Retrieved from http://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Incarcerated-Women-and-Girls.pdf

Sharp, S. F., & Ericksen, M. E. (2003). Imprisoned mothers and their children. In B. H. Zaitzow & J. Thomas (Eds.), *Women in prison: Gender and social control* (pp. 119-136). Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the wake: On blackness and being*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Siegel, J. A. (2011). *Disrupted childhoods: Children of women in prison*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Snyder, Z. K., Carlo, T. A., & Coats Mullins, M. M. (2002). Parenting from prison. *Marriage & Family Review*, *32*(3), 33-61.

Somers, M. R. (1994). The narrative constitution of identity: A relational and network approach. *Theory & Society*, *23*, 605-649.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Toyoki, S., & Brown, A. D. (2014). Stigma, identity and power: Managing stigmatized identities through discourse. *Human Relations*, *67*, 715-737.

Ugelvik, T. (2015). The rapist and the proper criminal: The exclusion of immoral others as narrative work on the self. In L. Presser & S. Sandberg (Eds.), *Narrative criminology: Understanding stories of crime*, (pp.23-41). New York: New York University Press.

Author Biographies

Beth A. Easterling is an assistant professor and Co-Director of Criminal Justice at Mary Baldwin University. Her research is focused on the impact of incarceration on the family and women in prison using qualitative methods.

Ben Feldmeyer is an associate professor at the University of Cincinnati, School of Criminal Justice. His research explores the relationships between race/ethnicity, immigration, social structure, crime, and punishment, focusing in particular on macro-level patterns of crime and victimization among Latino and immigrant populations. His recent work on these topics has appeared in *Criminology, Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, Social Problems, Social Science Research, Sociological Forum, and The Sociological Quarterly*.

Lois Presser is professor of Sociology at the University of Tennessee. She holds a PhD in Criminal Justice/Criminology from the University of Cincinnati, an MBA from Yale University, and a BS in Human Development and Family Studies from Cornell University. Guided by critical criminology, feminist theory, cultural sociology, and social constructionism, she has published extensively in the areas of narrative, harm, identity, and restorative justice.