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“I Literally Roll With The Punches”: Black and Latinx Women Coping Through Parental Incarceration

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Published on: Aug 30, 2021

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ABSTRACT

Racial and ethnic disparities have been shown to disproportionately impact Black and Latinx children within the criminal legal system. Parental incarceration is associated with emotional and psychological stresses for children, but these effects can extend beyond incarceration. Research suggests that parental incarceration is not a discrete event and problems during childhood can exacerbate throughout the life course. Yet, little is known on how challenges faced by parental incarceration transcend to adulthood. Further, an examination on the long-term effects of parental incarceration through the lens of race, ethnicity, and gender remains understudied. In order to address this gap, this study focused on the lived experiences of Black and Latinx young women. We utilized 11 semi-structured interviews to explicate how Black and Latinx young women compartmentalize the experience of parental incarceration and use coping strategies. Using an interpretative phenomenological analysis, we found that these young women interpret parental incarceration as an ongoing process and rely on four coping strategies. Thus, our findings highlight that despite the challenges of parental incarceration, young Black and Latinx women remain resilient by accepting the reality of their circumstances, keeping themselves occupied with tasks and activities, seeking their own social support systems and mental health care, and reconstructing their own prosocial identity.

Introduction

In the United States, at least 5 million children have experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lives (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). Research suggests that parental incarceration may have negative long-lasting impacts into adulthood (Foster & Hagan, 2015; Miller & Barnes, 2015). Yet, as parental incarceration disproportionally affects Black and Latinx children—often subjecting them to social exclusion and stigma (Foster & Hagan, 2007; The Pew Charitable Trust, 2010)—little scholarly attention has been given to these experiences as children emerge into adulthood. Further, research depicting the challenges of mass incarceration in the lives of young Black and Latinx women has even more rarity. In fact, scholars assert that the narratives of Black and Latinx women are lacking in criminology research and dismisses the intersectional framework of race, gender, and incarceration (Christian & Thomas, 2009; Mitchell & Davis, 2019).

Extant theory and research suggest that women of color face unique challenges centered on gendered racism (Essed, 1991). At the nexus of race and gender, the intersection of parental incarceration can also create additional structural and systemic barriers (Foster & Hagan, 2009). Therefore, parental incarceration might become a “master status”—a dominant status that defines an individual’s social identity—with stigmatized conditions (Goffman, 1963). Given that depression and psychological distress are apparent among Black women with familial incarceration (Patterson et al., 2020), it is important to understand how the effects of parental incarceration carry out from childhood into young adulthood. Research suggests that parental incarceration is not a discrete event but a process that unfolds overtime throughout the lived experience (Brown, 2017). As Black and Latinx women face social exclusion and are placed in marginalized positions when interacting with the criminal legal system (Christian & Thomas, 2009; Gunn et al., 2016), it is also important to understand the coping strategies these women utilize to address the stressors of their lived experiences.

Utilizing in-depth interviews with 11 Black and Latinx young women, we address the following question, "How do young women of color compartmentalize and cope through the experience of parental incarceration?" In doing so, we explicate how young women of color find coping mechanisms to navigate through the experience of parental incarceration and provide insight on their ability to remain resilient despite the challenges. Lastly, we highlight the implications and importance of conducting qualitative research that expands knowledge on the experiences of women of color.

Background

Critical Race Feminism

Critical race feminism, an extension of critical race theory (Collins, 2000), posits that race and gender are significant factors that influence inequalities and marginalization (Crenshaw, 1993). The extant literature on critical race feminism documents that there are unique challenges for women of color due to their subordinate racial, ethnic, and gender identities. The experiences of women of color are centralized to gendered racism—distinct forms of oppression intertwined with sexism and racism—that disproportionately impacts their well-being (Essed, 1991). Black women must navigate through oppression, discrimination, and negative imagery; these barriers are known to perpetuate challenges to their lived experiences (Spates et al., 2020). Critical race feminist studies have shown that Black women are more likely to experience stressors, psychological distress, low self-esteem, mental and physical health issues, and

disengagement and withdrawal from society (King, 2003; Szymanski & Stewart, 2010; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015; Woods-Giscombé & Lobel, 2008). Latinx women also face unique challenges and discrimination related to their ethnic and gender identities. Research shows that some of these challenges are not limited to but includes, navigating through stereotypes about their countries of origin, dealing with immigrant status and deportation, receiving less access to resources, and learning how to assimilate into new social structures (Harper, 2017; Messing et al., 2017). Consequently, Latinx women are more likely to report low levels of life satisfaction (Cuellar et al., 2004).

Of importance, scholars have also noted that the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, and incarceration can lead to psychological stressors for women of color (Mahaffey et al., 2016; Perry et al., 2013). In addition to challenges faced through gendered racism, involvement in the criminal legal system as a result of victimization, extensive histories of trauma, mental health problems, and substance use imposes multiple challenges for women of color (Link & Oser, 2017; National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women, 2016). Direct contact with the criminal legal system can create additional hinderances (Christian & Thomas, 2009). For example, Black and Latinx women with histories of incarceration and substance abuse are more likely to be stigmatized as bad mothers, addicts, and criminals (Gunn et al., 2016). These negative ascribed statuses lead to restrictions placed on their employment opportunities and access to social networks (Link & Oser, 2017). Furthermore, indirect criminal justice contact, such as familial incarceration, disproportionately impacts Black and Latinx women (Braman, 2004; Schnittker et al., 2015). Scholars indicate that familial incarceration increases psychological distress and depression among Black women as they must meet these demands while fulfilling multiple social roles (Patterson et al., 2020). Basic tenets of theory and research suggest that there is a need to continue examining the effects of race, ethnicity, and gender in tandem with incarceration. Further investigation can broaden our understanding on these lived experiences and reveal processes that are involved.

The Process of Parental Incarceration

Recent developments on parental incarceration research have considered long-term effects on the developmental stage of emerging adulthood. A burgeoning body of research examining these lasting impacts of parental incarceration has found its association with negative life outcomes related to mental and physical health, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, civic engagement, and criminal

offending (Foster & Hagan, 2015; Lee et. al, 2013; Lee et al., 2014; Miller & Barnes, 2015; Murray & Farrington, 2008; Turney & Lanuza, 2017). Although knowledge on the effects of parental incarceration into adulthood is still developing, research indicates that parental incarceration works as a process overtime for young adults (Brown, 2017). That is, parental incarceration may include events prior to and after parents' imprisonment that encompasses the overall experience of parental incarceration such as parents' arrest, court proceedings, sentencing, and recidivism (Christian, 2009; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002; Siegel, 2011). Consequently, parental incarceration can become a reoccurring process of reunification and cycles of returns to jail or prison. Parental incarceration goes beyond just a discrete event, it is a process in the wake of other family life circumstances and incorporates the lived experiences prior to and after their parent's incarceration (e.g., family climate, parenting style, parent's problem behaviors; Giordano et al., 2019). Therefore, interpretations and emotional responses of parental incarceration goes beyond the specific event of imprisonment.

Through a critical race feminist lens, scholarly research has made important contributions in areas focused on incarcerated mothers, mothers of incarcerated children, and adolescent girls of incarcerated parents (Garcia-Hallett, 2019; Hayes-Bautista, 2013; Lopez & Corona, 2012; Mitchell & Davis, 2019). Yet, little attention has been given to how parental incarceration specifically intersects with race, ethnicity, and gender for young women. These intersecting identities may explain the variation in coping strategies as these young women emerge into adulthood.

Coping Strategies Among Women of Color

Existing research suggests there are racialized and gendered differences in coping mechanisms. A study conducted by Koita and Triplett's (1998) examined whether race and gender influenced adolescents' reflection of themselves as rule violators. Their results found support that perceptions of being rule violators had a direct impact on White adolescent males, White adolescent females, and Black adolescent males. However, Black adolescent females were less likely to adhere to these perceptions signifying their ability to cope and adjust in ways that protect them against devalued statuses (Koita & Triplett, 1998). However, research provides far less detail as Black and Latinx women emerge into adulthood, especially whether their parent's criminality can become their "master status" (Goffman, 1963)—a stigmatized status in adulthood—or whether they enforce mechanisms to combat devalued statuses related to their race, gender, and experience with parental incarceration.

In order to cope through negative life experiences, studies demonstrate that women of color are more likely to employ strategies to combat these stressors (Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). The research documents that Black and Latinx women use coping mechanisms to navigate through their racial and gender identities such as, redefining their identity, relying on familial and religious support, and finding safe spaces to express their emotions (Dunn & O'Brien, 2009; Castillo et al., 2019; Spates et al., 2020). Similarly, at the intersection of incarceration, formerly incarcerated women are more likely to confront those who stigmatize them, reappropriate stigma from others, and withdraw from negative relationships. Black and Latinx incarcerated mothers choose to cope with incarceration by mothering from prison, disassociating their criminal past with identity, and transforming their behaviors and thinking (Celinska & Siegel, 2010).

Given the fact that women of color are more likely to experience social exclusion and challenges when interacting with the criminal legal system (Christian & Thomas, 2009), it is worth exploring this phenomenon among young women of color who have experienced parental incarceration. Research points to a variety of coping mechanisms that children of incarceration might employ such as distancing from the incarcerated parent, withdrawing from social relationships, finding support groups, and taking control of their circumstances (Foster & Hagan, 2009; Thulstrup & Karlsson, 2017). Nonetheless, it remains unclear on how intersecting identities impact coping mechanism for young women of color who are emerging into adult.

The Current Study

The current study examines how young Black and Latinx women compartmentalize and cope through the experience of parental incarceration. The effect of parental incarceration may have unique variations as these children emerge into adulthood, but also suggests that the effects of parental incarceration transmit differently based on the intersection of race and gender. Prior research on parental incarceration concludes that qualitative research would enhance our knowledge on these experiences and address these gaps within the literature (Easterling & Johnson, 2015; Young & Smith, 2019). Thus, our study is essential in that it examines the unique experiences of young Black and Latinx women, a population that is often excluded from existing criminological research (Christian & Thomas, 2009; Hayes-Bautista, 2013; Mitchell & Davis, 2019). We use the terminology "Latinx" as an alternative to describe the Latin American women within our study (Salinas, 2020). We recognize that there are nuances and variations with the use of this term, however, for the purposes of

interchangeability and inclusivity we refer to these descendants of Latin American countries as, "Latinx" (Salinas, 2020; Dame-Griff, 2021). We utilize 11 semi-structured interviews to understand their lived experiences with an intersectional framework of race, gender, and parental incarceration. We argue that the experience of parental incarceration is not limited to a discrete event for these young women but works as a process throughout their adulthood. We expect that their experiences of parental incarceration and coping strategies will be central to their intersecting identities as young Black and Latinx women.

Methods

Data Procedures

This study incorporates qualitative data from a larger study that captured how emerging adults make meaning of their experience with parental incarceration (Noel, 2020). To be eligible for the study, participants had to be between 18 and 30 years old, experienced at least one parent incarcerated before their 18th birthday, and the incarcerated parent must have spent time in jail or prison for at least three months. These requirements were aligned with study's focus of participants' connecting their childhood experience to their young adulthood (Arnett, 2000). As recruitment of this population is challenging, the timeframe of three months would allow the study to incorporate more participants who felt they were significantly impacted by the experience of parental incarceration, outside of the standard one-year prison sentences (Gipson, 2019; Young & Smith, 2019). A convenience strategy method was used with the purpose of recruiting young adults who were related to the phenomenon of interest. Recruitment first began with the assistance of local organizations, agencies, and community groups who disseminated flyers and contact information about the study. In the wake of COVID-19, alternative recruitment strategies were used such as social media posts, email listservs, community sites, and word of mouth. Once potential participants expressed interest in the study, a screening interview was conducted to verify their eligibility and to address their questions. Participants were also asked to complete an informed consent form and to grant permission for an audio recording. Following completion of the consent form, interviews were scheduled privately either through an in-person meeting, telephone, or Zoom video call.

Participants were asked to answer semi-structured interview questions to examine participants' experiences with parental incarceration. In particular, these questions focused on how participants view their experience with parental incarceration and strategies that they employ to deal with this experience. For example, participants

were asked, "Directly after your parent was incarcerated, what did you do to deal with the change?" and "In the future, do you feel you will use similar or different coping methods when you think about your parent being incarcerated?" After the interview, participants' demographic information was obtained through a structured questionnaire. These structured questions asked personal information related to their family life context prior to and after parental incarceration, involvement with risky drug and alcohol use, history of mental health disorders, and history of criminal justice contact (i.e., arrest, incarceration). Each interview concluded with a debriefing statement and if needed, contact with mental health resources were offered.

The first author conducted all interviews between November 2019 and April 2020. Interviews lasted between 1 hour to 2 hours and 31 minutes, with an average of 1 hour and 33 minutes. All participants were compensated with a \$25 Amazon voucher for their participation and committed time. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim through online transcription services and reviewed by six research team members to obtain verbatim transcriptions (Rudestam & Newton, 2014). To ensure that all transcriptions reflected participants' words, a second reviewer was assigned to review the edited transcription (i.e., the first author or another research team member). All participants were given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym and these names were reflected in the final version of the transcripts. Data procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the author's university.

Sample

Data includes interviews from twenty young adults; however, we limited our sample to only include the voices of Black and Latinx women. Due to inconsistencies and short responses, one respondent was removed from the analysis. As a result, this study's sample consists of 11 women (8 Black women and 3 Latinx women). Table 1 provides a descriptive overview of these women. Within this subsample, participants ranged from 20 to 29 years old, with an average age of 25 years old. In regard to educational attainment, one participant's highest level of education was a high school diploma or equivalent, one participant had some college education, four held a master's degree, and five participants obtained a four-year college or university degree. These demographics differs from research which shows that parental incarceration is associated with poor educational outcomes (Miller & Barnes, 2015; Murray et al., 2012).

Within this sample, participants experienced parental incarceration with a biological parent. Majority of participants experienced their father's incarcerated (n = 9; 82%),

except for two participants who experienced both mother and father incarcerated. Almost half of participants ($n = 5$; 46%) experienced parental incarceration for the first time at their early childhood stage (i.e., at birth to 5 years old). One participant experienced parental incarceration between 6 and 10 years old ($n = 1$; 9%) and others experienced it for the first time between 11 and 18 years old ($n = 5$; 46%). Parental incarceration was more commonly spent in prison ($n = 5$; 46%) than time spent in jail ($n = 3$; 27%), or periodically in both jail and prison ($n = 3$; 27%). The length of parents' sentences ranged from 1 year to 25 years. Three participants experienced their incarcerated parent deported shortly after their incarceration. Furthermore, at least five young women shared that were diagnosed with a mental health disorder related to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), adjustment disorder, anxiety, and depression.

Data Analysis

For our study, we employed an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (hereinafter, "IPA"). This form of analysis seeks to understand historical and situational circumstances that influences an individual's interpretation (Adu, 2019). We utilized IPA to capture how Black and Latinx women interpret their experience with parental incarceration and how these interpretations formulate their coping strategies. Three fundamental steps were involved in this process of data analysis. First, each transcript was reviewed multiple times to ascertain how young women compartmentalize parental incarceration. This step consisted of an extensive period of line-by-line coding and memo writing to identify these interpretations. NVivo was used as an organizational tool to identify these patterns. Next, a codebook was created to maintain consistent procedures and finalize the coding strategy. Through this process, specific codes and themes were developed based on participants' responses, analytic notes, reflective observations, and discussions (Maxwell, 2012). For example, a category of "Interpretations of Parental Incarceration" would include the theme of *ongoing process* with coded lines related to parental incarceration as a process in young adulthood (e.g., "I think I'm always going to resent my parents for not being stable"; "It continues."; "I think that still happens up until today."; "So [these feelings] always linger and they will always be carried with you."). These interpretations of parental incarceration also guided emerging themes centered on their coping mechanisms. An example of a theme, *accepting the reality of the circumstances* would include coded responses such as: "So like, if I didn't hear from him for like a year or two. It wasn't something that I questioned." Finally, narratives were compared and

contrasted as the final step in our data analysis to recognize overlaps and differences across these young women (Adu, 2019).

Results

Parental Incarceration as a Process

These women of color compartmentalized the experience of parental incarceration as a complex process that is still shaping their lives as emerging adults. Respondents described the process of parental incarceration in the following ways: (1) navigation through the immediate impacts of parental incarceration in childhood or adolescence, (2) evaluation of the relationship with their incarcerated parent, and (3) anticipation of future consequences as emerging adults. For instance, Nikki, a 29-year-old Black woman, expressed that after 19 years of parental incarceration, she is anxiously anticipating the release of her father:

It continues, It's almost like... I would explain to people... It's almost like I was in jail at the same time outside of prison. And I'm about to be released myself. And released into something that I'm not even used to. That's how I view it.

During the early years of her father's incarceration, Nikki recalls feelings of secondary prisonization as a child. Now as a young adult, Nikki also feels the process of parental incarceration continues as she awaits her father's release. Nikki's difficulties of witnessing adverse experiences with her father during childhood, navigating through strenuous prison visitations as a teenager, and evaluating the detrimental effects of incarceration on her family as a young adult, impacted her decision to disassociate herself from her incarcerated father. Yet, the process continues even though Nikki no longer maintains a relationship with her father. In the future, as Nikki anticipates her father's release from prison, she envisions herself going to "therapy everyday" to cope with this ongoing experience.

Similarly, Laila provided a detailed narrative that outlined parental incarceration as a process throughout her life course. At the age of 3, Laila's 19-year-old father was convicted of robbery and sentenced to 14 years in prison. The consequences of her father's incarceration began to weigh heavily during her adolescent years when family dynamics shifted within her home. Laila became her siblings' caregiver and the responsibility of "raising kids" accelerated her into an adult role. A few years later, the effects of parental incarceration continued to work as a process in Laila's life when her father was released from prison. Due to Laila's experience of parental incarceration at

a young age, Laila did not have a relationship with her father outside of prison walls. She described viewing her father as "a figment of [her] imagination." Upon her father's release, Laila felt as though she had a biological father on paper but a stranger in her home. She describes never calling a man "dad" before and having to train herself towards this new adjustment. Laila states: "Like I would sit there with myself like just, girl just say it, like that's your dad just say it and really quick and get it out." Laila further explained this adjustment:

Like I felt like throwing him into the mix was insane for our psychological, like for my psyche that was crazy. Like that didn't make any sense to me. Like I didn't get it.... Jail is like detrimental to like your mental health right... Like when he first came home and he still—he still does it now, he's not a social person at all. And when he first came home maybe for like the first two years, he would sit in the living room, and he would sit [behind] the curtains, he would be like wrapped in the curtain sitting in front of the window... Like it was almost like he was putting himself back in like this like secluded space, but that's how he's been for the past 12 years.

In addition to a new living arrangement, tensions emerged between Laila and her father because of her parental role towards her siblings. She describes their current relationship:

So, we definitely have like a lot of—and I think that still happens like up until today, like we have a lot of, like, you know, tug of wars and battles with each other because I felt like I had to kind of take on his responsibility and he came in and I never felt like there was a thank you. And I never felt like he took responsibility for what his absence did to—and I also think that he gives himself way more credit than he deserves. So, yeah, it was awkward, it's still awkward sometimes.

At some point I feel like our relationship did get okay, and then it went back downhill because of all of the, all the things that don't want to be discussed, right.

For Laila, the effects of parental incarceration extend beyond imprisonment. First, the experience of parental incarceration impacted Laila's navigation as a teenager as she had to take on adult responsibilities. Then, parental incarceration continued to impact her adjustment to her father's mental health conditions after his release. Lastly, the experience of parental incarceration continues to influence Laila's outlook as a young adult. As Laila anticipates a future with her father, she still believes there is still a "19-year-old trapped inside of him" and that their relationship will be reconciled "when it

makes some sense." Through the narratives of Nikki and Laila, the consequences of parental incarceration are not limited to childhood or adolescent years, but it continues to work as a process in their lives as young women.

Coping Mechanisms and Remaining Resilient

Despite the ongoing effects of parental incarceration, our findings demonstrated that young Black and Latinx women discussed their ability to cope and remain resilient through four salient themes: (a) acknowledging their incarcerated parent's decisions and accepting the reality of the circumstances, (b) keeping themselves occupied with tasks and activities, (c) relying on social support groups or mental health services, and (d) reconstructing their social identity.

Putting themselves in their incarcerated parent's shoes

Six respondents (55%) described accepting the reality of their circumstances in order to cope through the experience of parental incarceration. This entailed putting themselves in their parent's shoes to understand what might have permitted their parent's past and current decisions. For example, Emma, a 23-year-old Latinx woman, described her desire to seek a deeper understanding on the circumstances that led to her father's issues with alcohol use and his period of time spent in jail for a year. She states:

I'm still dealing with it and now I'm asking more questions, because before I was not comfortable with making him uncomfortable. But I think in a—in a way for me to, to start that process of forgiveness and moving forward I would like to know... kind of what his mentality was during all of that, because I never really got that conversation with him of "what was going through your head when all of this happened?" And, how he feels moving forward.

In addition to seeking answers about their parent's circumstances, a willingness to accept the realities of these circumstances served as a coping mechanism for these women. Laila describes how she was able to push through the adjustment of her father returning home from prison. Her response is illustrated below:

Interviewer: And what about today? How do you deal with him being back, today? How do you cope with that?

Laila: I don't live with him no more. And the thing is I just, at some point, and I wish I could pinpoint, like at one point I was just like, alright this man is here, and he ain't [sic] going nowhere. Like at some point that became, you know reality.

Like alright he's home, they're married, he's not going anywhere, so gotta [sic] start, you know?

Janae also discussed accepting the realities of the circumstances. Janae's father was incarcerated as early as her birth. Although they maintained a relationship while in prison, Janae faced disappointment when the relationship was not rekindled after his release. In fact, she experienced "hurt" when her father married and had other children and "created that happy family that [she] always wanted." In spite of this negative outcome, Janae has learned to cope through the process by understanding her father's conditions and accepting the reality of the circumstances. She expresses:

So, I think I just cope with it as like it happened, and then, like I look at like where he is now and all that he's accomplished. So it's kind of like I said before, I'm not ashamed or anything, um, the coping kinda just comes from, it happened and he's out and he's doing well.

These sentiments were also echoed by Beth. In order to cope through prison visitations and maintain a relationship with her father, she chose to acknowledge the positive attributes of her father and the role that he played within her life. Beth describes how she accepted her father's incarceration:

Because, you know I knew, I like, I love him [laughing]. I mean, that sounds weird to say, but like... like he, even to this day, he's never been like, you know, a bad guy and mean...It was never like, 'oh, like, my dad is a strange man like I can't.' Like, he was always present to me.

Comparatively, Nikki placed herself in her father's position and assessed the circumstances that led to his imprisonment for sexual assault. An acknowledgment of her father's conditions, propelled Nikki to accept the reality that he made irresponsible decisions which hindered their ability to maintain a relationship. Further, she believes that accepting the reality of her father's circumstances guarded her from having to cope through the negative effects of parental incarceration:

[I]t's not about the actual crime that he committed, as to why I feel the way that I do. Now that I'm an adult it's more so about, you had a family, you had kids. Why weren't you thinking about them, when that happened? Why...it's like you...you didn't care. You didn't care what we would think, you didn't care about going to jail or not seeing us again. It's more so about that.

Um...I mean he was pretty much dead to me. So I—Like, that I didn't really have to cope because he was—he was dead to me, like I didn't really—I didn't look at him as my father. So it was nothing that I really had to cope because I didn't feel like I needed to.

In order to move forward and cope with consequences of parental incarceration, these young women of color chose to acknowledge their parent's decisions and conditions. These internal assessments of their parent's behaviors influenced their ability to accept the reality of the circumstances. Acceptance of reality entailed accepting both the good and the bad outcomes of their situation and moving forward with their lives. In the words of Taylor, whose father was incarcerated and deported, she has learned to accept his absence within her life: "I just...I literally roll with the punches."

Keeping themselves busy

Out of the 11 Black and Latinx women, five women's responses (45%) were related to keeping themselves occupied with tasks and activities. Keeping busy was used as a behavioral strategy by most women to "get through the day to day" and find a "good outlet". Rumi, a Latinx woman, shared that within her household she was culturally conditioned to remain quiet about her father's incarceration that "it became the norm to just not talk about it and pretend it didn't happen." She expressed her way of coping through the silence:

So if I had to like guess my coping mechanism, it would be like, I really started taking care of the house and of my mom and of my sisters. Um, in order to like keep myself distracted from like dealing with it myself. Or, it wasn't even intentional to keep myself distracted. I think that was just, if I didn't take that role...I don't know the house is going to fall apart. My mom was gonna [sic] be a lot worse. Um, and so I think that's [pause] I'm guessing that's just the way that I coped with like distracting myself and keeping my mind busy. Um, by taking care of my mom. Taking care of the house and things like that.

While Rumi kept herself occupied through house chores and family responsibilities, Kyras approach was focused on keeping herself occupied outside of her home. She recalled how she coped through her father's incarceration:

I'm someone, I like to keep busy. Like, I like to keep busy so that I don't have time to think about stuff. So at the time [of parental incarceration], I was in high school. I was president of the Student Government. I was in a bunch of clubs. I

joined like different sports. Like, I was just basically keeping myself like really busy so that I really wouldn't have time to think about it.

Although keeping busy allowed these women to become distracted and take their minds away from their parent's incarceration, one respondent discussed the risks involved with avoiding the situation. Taylor expressed:

And I guess, [sigh] according to my therapist [laugh] the real adjustment came where I just started becoming like hyper productive, right? So, my edu- like my grades like went through the roof because I was just doing what I knew best. And they say for some people like depression manifests in like, in like inability to do anything and then someone is like it's super high functioning, and I kind of went on that end of the spectrum.

Nevertheless, like Taylor, both Black and Latinx women believed that in the end, the benefits of keeping their minds occupied and away from parental incarceration outweighed the risks of emotional dysregulation. They believed this coping mechanism awarded them with the opportunity to still achieve success in the midst of this adversity.

Relying on support

Majority of women of color (8 out of 11) indicated their reliance on support through family members, friends, social networks, and mental health services. Their experience of parental incarceration was commonly associated with parental absence, familial disruptions, financial strains, stigma, and feelings of isolation. However, support received from others and access to mental health services became useful coping strategies to mitigate these negative outcomes. Jasmine noted her ability to remain resilient through her traumatic childhood experiences, such as witnessing her mother's drug addiction and having of both of her parents:

Definitely my [adoptive] parents. I don't know. I would not be anywhere near like, as far as I am today. If I did not have my parents. Like biggest support. [And] like my best friend from middle school. She's like, my soul sister, and she's always a phone call away. Yeah, even the people at my job. My bosses like, then we have like a little family there. Those are like...[pause]. It's nice.

Like Jasmine, Jalada experienced both of her parents incarcerated. While Jalada did not receive emotional support from her biological and foster care family, her reliance on supportive friends allowed her to cope during her parents' incarceration. Jalada

believes that this placement of support changed her perceptions about parental incarceration and lessened her externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression, defiance, violence). She shared in detail:

Well my closest friend she was in a similar situation, but she wasn't in foster care. But she just didn't have a good relationship with her mom. So, we relied heavily on each other for that. And my friends were the ones that was also pushing me like academically, pushing me emotionally, encouraging me to like stop being so stubborn, and things like that. I just—I just... Throughout my years of education, I just keep meeting great people that have just been like, really just genuine and honest so they've definitely helped me to step out of my shell too, and just be—own who I am and really like turn away from like, the aggression. And because I used to be very aggressive, I still can be, but not as aggressive as, uh, as I was when I was younger. Um, I used to be very opinionated, still am, but I don't fight as much as I, like, fight for opinions as much as I used to. Um, I used to be really insecure. Um... yeah, but my friends um really just encouraged me to not be.

Along with emotional support received from friends and family, these women also recounted financial support. Kyrax experienced hardships such as homelessness and financial strains, she describes how reliance on her support system allowed her cope through her father's incarceration:

Like the few friends that I did confide in to about it, like they were really supportive about it. Like um they were understanding about like my emotions, even though like I didn't fully understand them. Like, so like, they just allowed me to feel it and try to tell me like, "You know," like, "Well, that's your dad. So like you kinda [sic] have to," or whatever the case may be it was just like whatever I feel, it's okay, and they would support me in it. Um some of them would like even like send me money to like accommodate for the fact that like, because he called so much and the calls were adding up. So that I would have like money so that he could call.

Due to the experience of parental incarceration, two respondents felt that they could not rely on others for support. Their reasons for a lack of reliance varied between these respondents; Gabriella faced challenges with trusting others and Taylor did not have access to a support system. It is worth mentioning that Gabriella, a young Latinx woman, and Taylor, a young Black woman, both experienced their parents' incarceration and deportation. The immigrant status of their family members prohibited them from obtaining full support and increased shame in their ability to

seek support from others. Within these circumstances, these women sought an alternative support system through mental health services. These experiences are described, respectively, by Gabriella and Taylor:

Gabriella: And so I have always like thought that people will come and go in my life and so I'm not very trusting. Um, he was quick to anger and... so that's why I went to counseling and—and those are like parts of why... I'm still like unpacking.

Taylor: Like there's different things in place that exist, that like my mom didn't have access to that information, she didn't even know a lot of these things existed. And so she couldn't provide all of those extra things that probably could have helped us, had she known....Hence, I ended up in therapy recently.

Their reliance on mental health services allowed Gabriella and Taylor to cope through the experience of parental incarceration as women of color. Stigma and shame associated with incarceration and deportation conditioned them to not discuss this experience with others, or to be limited in their support system. Mental health care services with a private therapist allowed these women to be transparent about their family situation and address their emotions and loss.

Reconstructing their identity

As these respondents are emerging into adulthood, they also sought ways to cope with the stigma associated with their parent's criminal identity. For some of these women (5 out of 11), this resulted in them reconstructing their own identity as children of incarcerated parents. Reconstructing their identity was discussed as a form of empowerment to challenge negative societal reactions about their subordinate status. Rather than adhering to negative perceptions about parental incarceration, these women of color used this experience to advance in their life goals, rebuild their prosocial identity, and inspire others. For example, Taylor, Kyras, and Jalada reflect on how they reconstruct their identity, respectively:

Taylor: Once I wrote the essay, and this is gonna [sic] sound like cold, but, once I wrote the entrance essay to college, I realized I have a leveraging tool here. You know? You are gonna [sic] become the source by which I push through my education. I further my education, by way of telling, this, story. You know? People are amazed by it. It's intriguing. So as much as it was like a total selfish reason, it did make me put it in a positive light by being like, "I can use this to help me, in a positive way um [pause] and so it's not embarrassing, anymore." You know?

Kyrah: [M]y thing is just like, I don't want to allow the opportunity to allow anyone to treat me differently. So, if I'm sharing it with someone, I'm not sharing it with you as like, 'Oh,' like, 'This is what I went through because my dad got arrested and, like, it was so hard.' Or like, I'm not sharing it for sympathy, and I'm also not sharing it for judgment. It's just like, no, this happened, but it has nothing to do with who I am.

Jalada: So, I basically became a social worker. But like, throughout my life it was either going to be a teacher or a social worker... Even now, I mean, I'm like, really just open and honest about like, my experience. That has helped me like you know, just in like my truth and stuff like that. Like, that's really helped me to just really come to terms with what, you know, what has happened. And then I really thoroughly enjoy like bringing people together and like, this is why I chose social work due to my own circumstances.

In sum, these three respondents' coping mechanism included reconstructing their identity to manage the stigma associated with parental incarceration. Taylor chose to embrace her experience of parental incarceration by revealing it through a college entrance essay. She described people being intrigued by her experience and discovered that her story is a leveraging tool for her advancement in education. Throughout young adulthood, Taylor continues to use this story to her advantage. First, she was able to successfully able to enter into a Ph.D. program by being using her experience with parental incarceration as strength for research and teaching. Second, she received funded grants to conduct research on social and economic rights. Taylor believes her success is attributed to her transparency about her father's incarceration and deportation. In relation to empowerment, Kyrah shares her story to reaffirm her prosocial identity and to combat negative perceptions on who she is as a child of an incarcerated parent. As a young Black woman, Kyrah uses this reconstruction of her identity as a coping strategy to overcome the stigma of parental incarceration. Inevitably, this gives her the autonomy to frame her own narrative and emphasize to others that her father made a mistake, but "it doesn't speak to his character entirely." Similarly, Jalada uses her experience of parental incarceration to work through her own circumstances. Jalada's transparency about parental incarceration allows her to fully embrace the incarceration of both of her parents. The ability to cope through the experience inspires others with her profession and brings a positive light to those who are going through similar experiences. Jalada continues to reconstruct her identity through an online blog where she shares her experiences, challenges, and self-care practices.

Discussion

Our findings provide unique perspectives from young Black and Latinx women who have experienced parental incarceration. Aside from the intersections of their race, ethnicity, and gender, we found that parental incarceration also initiates stressors that impacts the well-being for young Black and Latinx women. This study unveiled their stories and identified how the effect of parental incarceration continues to work as an ongoing process within their lives. Despite these challenges, participants developed coping strategies which consisted of four salient themes: (a) acknowledging their incarcerated parent's decisions and accepting the reality of the circumstances, (b) keeping themselves occupied with tasks and activities, (c) relying on social support groups or mental health services, and (d) reconstructing their social identity. Within this study, we observed that the selection of these coping strategies involved a variety of interrelated factors. For example, accepting the reality of their circumstances and relying on social support were found to be the most salient themes among these women, compared to keeping themselves occupied and reconstructing their social identity. Nevertheless, we found that their ability to remain resilient throughout these experiences triumphed throughout their narratives.

In our study, accepting the reality of their circumstances was an important coping strategy for young Black and Latinx women. Participants sought to understand their incarcerated parent's past decisions and current conditions. Although this involved accepting both the good and bad circumstances, this strategy allowed these women to move forward with their lives and redefine the parental relationship. One plausible explanation as to why these young women accepted their circumstances may be influenced by culture which stems from their racial and gendered experiences. Due to race and gender oppression, cultural awareness and consciousness might lead women of color to have a realistic viewpoint on what shapes their circumstances (Collins, 1989), and in the midst of traumatic life experiences, they are more likely to accept the reality of their circumstances (Watkins-Hayes et al., 2012). These findings also support the claim that in the midst of adversity, women of color accept the reality of their circumstances by "clearing away distractions of desire" (i.e., removing the way they want things to be and accepting the way things are; Mattis, 2002; p. 314). In other words, Black and Latinx women possibly used this as a coping strategy to remove their desires of seeking difficult answers about their parent's incarceration, obtaining the ideal parent-child relationship during parental incarceration, and reconciling with their incarcerated parent after their release. Although there are filial therapy groups (i.e., structured role-playing sessions) for incarcerated parents to amend the parental

relationship, these therapy training groups are limited and often does not involve full participation with the child (Armstrong et al., 2019, Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998). Consequently, Black and Latinx children must learn to navigate these internal assessments of their desires and acceptance of reality, all on their own. A lack of resources and the culture of silence might delay their ability to successfully come to their own realizations. This speaks to the necessity of providing family counseling and therapy groups at earlier stages of parental incarceration to adjust to the burdens of parental absence, long-term separation, and release from incarceration.

Keeping themselves occupied was another coping strategy found within this study. For Black and Latinx women who felt they had to maintain the silence of their parents' incarceration, occupied themselves to cope through the experience. These occupied tasks included house chores, extracurricular activities, and educational performance. Keeping themselves occupied might be the result of the "conspiracy of silence" among children of incarcerated parents (i.e., a culture of silence that prohibit children from disclosing information about their incarcerated parent; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). Given the fact that parental incarceration is associated with shame, stigma, and negative societal reactions (Braman, 2004), these silencing effects might propel children of incarcerated parents to create their own coping mechanisms of "busyness" to deal with parental incarceration. These findings are consistent with research which found that women of color are socialized to adopt a "Strong Black Woman" schema to masks their internal struggles and often take on multiple roles and responsibilities to postpone their self-care (Liao et al., 2019). As these women mentioned in the study, this coping strategy contains useful benefits in that it allowed them to be goal-oriented and driven. However, these women also acknowledged that keeping themselves occupied enabled silence and avoidance towards their emotions. Scholars assert that at the center of emotional dysregulation is the intersection of race and gender in which trauma-imposed Black women are more likely to report higher levels of emotional dysregulation (Mekawi, 2020). Our work supports these claims by revealing the difficulties these women of color faced in dealing with parental incarceration. Majority of these women voiced that this was the first time they shared their experience with someone outside of their family. As one participant stated, "Thank you for that commitment that you've made to listening to me, specifically. Like, I have not talked about this at all, and I feel at ease that someone knows." Policies should provide additional outlets for children of incarcerated parents to share their voices and express themselves in supportive environments. Safe spaces are essential to means of survival for women of color as it provides an opportunity for them recognize shared

experiences with each other and find support through their emotions (Spates et al., 2019). These narratives point out that there is a need to disenable the culture of silence and exclusion among Black and Latinx women.

Additionally, most participants coped by relying on social support groups or mental health services. Black and Latinx women relied heavily on social support, especially through friends and family. This finding aligns with research on the wellbeing of children of incarcerated parents, which offers the recommendation that access to social support enables resiliency and success through parental incarceration (Arditti & Johnson, 2020). In addition, it is worth mentioning that there were two participants who dealt with deportation. The immigrant status of their family members prohibited them from having access to social support groups. One participant described most of her family members being undocumented and the other participant described several of her family members being deported. The experience of parental incarceration not only hindered their ability to obtain support through their families, but also led to a distrust in seeking support from friends or community members. A systematic review concludes that children of incarcerated parents are ineffective at utilizing other coping strategies if they lack social support within their environments (Thulstrup & Karlsson, 2017). The research also states that due to the stigma of incarceration, children of incarcerated parents are more likely to enter "trajectories of exclusion" (Foster & Hagan, 2009, p.9). To the extent that these trajectories of exclusion interconnect with the intersecting identities or race, ethnicity, and gender, our research highlights an alternative outcome—strengths were found among these Black and Latinx women. Instead of entering into this trajectory of exclusion, these women found an alternative coping strategy for support. Within our study, these two participants deliberately sought support through mental health services to cope through their experience. Black and Latinx women understood that social support, whether in the form of family, friends, or therapy, was an essential coping mechanism to deal with the long-term consequences of parental incarceration.

Lastly, other participants reconstructed their identity as a form of empowerment to cope through parental incarceration. This included changing their narrative from negative to positive to obtain their goals, creating a prosocial identity of inspiration through their experience, and helping other children who have similar pathways. The stigma of incarceration can carry from the incarcerated parent and extend towards children (Luther, 2016). Children of incarcerated parents are often aware of the stigma incarceration yields on their identities (Siegel, 2011). Consistent with quantitative research, scholarly work shows that an awareness of their stigma often compels

children to develop management techniques to alleviate the connection between parental incarceration and their prosocial identity (Foster & Hagan, 2009; Giordano, 2010; Johnson & Easterling, 2015; Luther, 2016). This reflects what scholars refer to as “meaning-making” processes in which intersecting identities contributes to subjective meanings about adverse circumstances (Mattis, 2002). Therefore, young Black and Latinx women within this study reconstructed their identity to obtain autonomy over their story and redefine how they would like to be perceived by others.

Limitations

Although this study provides important insights on the lives of young Black and Latinx women, there are several limitations that should be acknowledged. Participants were recruited through a convenience sample during the wake of COVID-19. Thus, participants in the study resided predominantly in the Northeast ($n = 9$; 82%), while a few resided in the Midwest ($n = 1$; 9%) and South ($n = 1$; 9%). These findings may not accurately represent this population. Broader trends and application of these coping mechanisms may differ by region or location. We also recognize that the sample size of our research study provides a few shortcomings. This sample contains certain characteristics that might be uniquely distinct from the general population. First, our research study consisted of Black and Latinx women with high levels of educational attainment compared to research that indicates children of incarcerated parents reach low educational attainment (Miller & Barnes, 2015; Murray et al., 2012). Second, one occurrence of parental incarceration ($n = 8$; 73%) was more common than multiple occurrences of parental incarceration ($n = 3$; 27%) which might provide insight on their ability to develop consistent coping strategies. Third, our study only includes the voices of three Latinx women. This possibly limited the perspectives of Latinx women within our analysis. We suggest that future studies investigate these effects with a diverse sample and continue to examine these nuanced dynamics among this population.

Implications

Black and Latinx children are disproportionately impacted by parental incarceration. Approximately, one in nine Black children were reported to have a parent behind bars (The Pew Charitable Trust, 2010) and Latinx children were twice as likely to have an incarcerated parent than White children (Schirmer et al., 2009). Black and Latinx women may not only be impacted through gendered racism, but the experience of parental incarceration. The purpose of the research study was to examine the intersectionality of race, gender, and parental incarceration. We focused specifically on

the ways in which these young women compartmentalized the experience of parental incarceration and used coping mechanisms. Our findings offer two essential implications based on these narratives.

First, there is a need for policies and practitioners to offer inclusive programs for young Black and Latinx women. As our findings indicate, parental incarceration is not a discrete event, and policies should acknowledge that parental incarceration is an ongoing process beyond childhood. Therefore, programs should not only be geared towards early development stages, but young adulthood as issues with parental incarceration continue to emerge within the lives of Black and Latinx women. Findings from Johnson and Easterling (2015) indicate that coping mechanisms formulated by Black adolescents vary by age and might enable long-lasting effects, suggesting that coping mechanisms may change overtime and should be fully explored within each developmental stage. Future work should understand how coping mechanisms may be altered from childhood to emerging adulthood and how other intersecting identities might interfere with young Black and Latinx women's ability to cope through parental incarceration (e.g., motherhood, history of arrest or incarceration, marriage).

Finally, qualitative research is needed to give voice to this selected group of women. An understanding on their lived experiences can provide knowledge on their coping strategies that enables long-term resiliency. These strengths and forms of resiliency of this population should be recognized in policies. Our research supports that young women of color are able to rise above deficit-based models and achieve effective coping mechanisms in safe and supportive environments. Trainings should be offered to not only break down racial and gender stereotypes, but stereotypes related to parental incarceration. Trainings should focus on developing cultural knowledge, building rapport and trust, and examining strategies that will enable successful outcomes and resiliency. These discoveries through qualitative research may be able to provide additional knowledge and recommendations on how to combat the negative effects of parental incarceration.

Table 1

Descriptive Information on Black and Latinx Women (N = 11)

Variables	N	%
Race/Ethnicity		

Black or African American	8	72.7%
Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish Origin	3	27.3%
Age		
20 – 25	4	36.4%
25 – 30	7	63.6%
Highest Level of Education		
Less than high school	0	0.0%
High school diploma or equivalent	1	9.1%
Some college	1	9.1%
Bachelor's Degree	5	45.5%
Master's Degree	4	36.4%
Experienced Parental Incarceration of		
Father	9	81.8%
Mother	0	0.0%
Both	2	18.2%
Age of Parental Incarceration		
0-5	5	45.5%
6-10	1	9.1%
11-15	4	36.4%
16-18	1	9.1%

Type of Parental Incarceration		
Jail	3	27.3%
Prison	5	45.5%
Both jail and prison	3	27.3%
Length of Parental Incarceration^a		
0-5 years	3	27.3%
6-10 years	3	27.3%
10 years or more	2	18.2%
Deported	3	27.3%
Diagnosed with Mental Health Disorder		
Yes	5	45.5%
No	6	54.5%
<i>Note:</i> ^a The length of parents' incarceration only includes calculations for one parent and uses the longest duration experienced if both parents were incarcerated.		

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