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PARENTAL INCARCERATION AND STIGMA: A QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS
OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS

by

Samantha Nguyen

Masters of Arts, Wilfrid Laurier University 2022

THESIS

Submitted to the Department of Criminology

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

Masters of Arts in Criminology

Wilfrid Laurier University

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Abstract

Children of parental incarceration are often forgotten victims and have been noted to experience collateral consequences such as stigma, poor mental health, and isolation. Since children are often forgotten, there is a lack of information regarding their experiences, what resources are available to them, and whether or not these resources intend to be beneficial. One of the resources that are available to children, caregivers, and other adults are children's books regarding parental incarceration. To determine whether or not these children's books act as a guide, this study examined the content and illustrations of 19 children's books on parental incarceration. The goal of this study was to see how these books aligned with theory. More specifically, stigma theory played an important role as it provided concepts when I theorized my data so that I could evaluate whether, how, and to what extent the content of the children's books seeks to counteract the stigmatizing process that children experience. Based on my analysis, the stories and illustrations in the children's books served a purpose of educating children, caregivers, and other adults on what parental incarceration is like and the different types of strategies used to help children cope with their experiences. However, based on my analysis, there also seems to be gaps from real-life negative experiences with parental incarceration. As such, these books are a starting point for children, caregivers and other adults but is not the only support that children need to deal with parental incarceration. Therefore, this research contributes to the existing research on parental incarceration and the resources available to children to help them cope.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In 2017/2018, the number of prisoners in Canada saw a 4% decrease from 2016/2017 (2018 Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview, 2019). Although Canada's incarceration rate saw a decrease it remains higher than many other Western nations with the exception of the United States, whose rate is 655 per 100,000 (2018 Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview, 2019). In comparison, Canada's national incarceration rate was 127 adults per 100,000 population (2018 Corrections and Conditional Releases Statistical Overview, 2019). Thus, in spite of Canada's incarceration rate ranking at 138th out of 223 countries, there remains a great deal of work that needs to be done to lower these rates (2018 Corrections and Conditional Releases Statistical Overview, 2019).

One consequence of Canada's relatively high rate of incarceration is its impact on families, and more specifically, children of incarcerated parents. Although recent statistics are difficult to obtain, approximately 357,607 children are impacted by incarceration (Withers & Folsom, 2007). To date, Canadian sources on the correctional system lack information on children of incarcerated parents and the impact of parental incarceration. That is, children of incarcerated parents are often forgotten victims and referred to as "orphans of justice" or "secondary victims of crime" (Hanington, 2020; Murray et al., 2012; Reimer, 2019).

There is a growing body of research, however, that has examined the impact of parental incarceration on children. Specifically, having a parent incarcerated can lead to collateral consequences for the offender themselves and their families, specifically their children (Turanovic et al., 2012). Children of incarcerated parents can experience direct and indirect negative outcomes such as stigma, mental health concerns, poorer social skills, and lower academic achievement (Knudsen, 2016).

A study on 534 federally sentenced male offenders revealed that 52.8% are fathers with children (Withers & Folsom, 2007). This study, which only reviewed fathers in federal custody is the most recent research on the rates of children with incarcerated parents. Therefore, research on the demographics of children with an incarcerated parent and its impact on children is still needed today. In addition, families are rarely given the supports needed on how to help children cope with parental incarceration (Phillips & Gates, 2011). Thus, there is still a pressing need to study the impact of parental incarceration and the availability of family supports available today.

Among the supports that are given to families of parental incarceration, one of the more niche sources are children's books. Children's books of parental incarceration act as a tool for children, parents, and other adult figures and aim to explain the experiences of children of parental incarceration. However, there is a lack of research on how children's books specifically are constructed to aid children of parental incarceration.

As such, the goal of the study was to examine the content in children's books that are geared towards children who have an incarcerated parent. The goal of examining the content in the children's books was to see how they were intended to help children and whether they aligned with existing theory such as but not limited to stigma and ambiguous loss. Before detailing the study and results, I will provide an overview on several related subjects. First, the definition of a child and parental incarceration will be explained. Second, trends and patterns of families and incarceration rates in Canada will be reviewed. Third, existing demographics on children and their families will be examined. Next, a more detailed look at the effects of parental incarceration on the child and their families will be explored. Lastly, I will examine existing supports for children with an incarcerated parent. Ultimately, grounded theory will provide a theoretical framework for my research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Parental Incarceration in Canada

Definitions

In Canada, the age that constitutes the definition of a child varies by province and territories, with some provinces and territories defining a child as someone under the age of 16 or someone under the age of 18 (Government of Canada, 2013). For the purposes of this paper, a child will be defined using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child definition, which Canada ratified in 1991 (UN General Assembly, 1990). According to the Convention, Article 1 states, “a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (UN General Assembly, 1990). In addition, parental incarceration will be defined as a parent being held in custodial confinement, whether it is provincial and territorial, or federal custody (Malakieh, 2018; Murray et al., 2012).

Families and Incarceration in Canada

In the following section, I will briefly cover major patterns of incarceration before proceeding with a review of the rates of parental incarceration alongside research on the demographics of the caregiver and children’s perceptions of the justice system. Historically, Canada has relatively high rates of incarceration compared to other Western nations (Public Safety Canada Portfolio Corrections Statistics Committee, 2019). However, as compared to the increasing incarceration rates of the United States, Canada’s pattern of incarceration has declined over the last five years (Brown et al., 2019; Malakieh, 2018). On average, a total of 38, 786 adults were in custody per day in 2017/2018 (Malakieh, 2018). From this total, 14, 129 adults

were in federal custody whereas the remaining 24, 657 adults were held in provincial and territorial custody (Malakieh, 2018).

There is considerably less data on the number of prisoners in Canadian correctional facilities with children and, more specifically, the rates of children impacted by parental incarceration. This lack of data extends to the number of parents in custody, the number of children placed in foster care, and the characteristics such as age and race of children impacted by parental incarceration (Canadian Friends Service Committee, 2018).

Currently, the most recent data in Canada on children of incarcerated parents is from 2007 (Withers & Folsom, 2007). Based on this data, approximately 357, 604 Canadian children were affected by parental incarceration (Withers & Folsom, 2007). Out of 534 federally sentenced male offenders, 31.6% were custodial fathers, so fathers who were living with their children at the time of their arrest, whereas 21.2% were non-custodial, so fathers who had children that they were not living with. In total, the incarcerated fathers had 595 children. Additionally, the latest data collected from Correctional Service Canada, in 2007, revealed that 52.8% of males incarcerated are fathers, whereas, 75% of women in prison are mothers (Brown et al., 2019; Withers & Folsom, 2007). Moreover, the survey showed 38.7% of incarcerated fathers reported their children did not partake in visitation hours (Withers & Folsom, 2007). Similarly, it was rare for mothers to see their children, and most incarcerated mothers had little regular contact with their children (Brown et al., 2019).

Next, data reveals that Indigenous adults are overrepresented in prison. That is, despite Indigenous adults representing approximately 4% of the Canadian adult population, they accounted for 26% of the provincial and territorial custody admissions in 2015/2016 (Government of Canada, 2019). In 2017/2018, Indigenous adults represented about 4% of the

adult population and the rates of incarceration increased to 30% admissions to provincial and territorial custody and 29% to federal custody (Malakieh, 2018). Although incarceration rates have been declining in the past five years, the over-representation of Indigenous adults are still increasing. More specifically, the adult population in the three territories totaled 88, 800 adults in 2017 which represents less than 1% of the overall adult population in Canada (Malakieh, 2018).

Furthermore, young male adults are overrepresented in custody compared to females. Evidently, in 2017/2018, 85% of provincial and territorial custodial admissions and 92% of admissions to federal custody were males (Malakieh, 2018). More specifically, 58% of provincial and territorial, and 59% of federal custodial admissions were males aged 20 to 39 years old. On the other hand, 11% of provincial and territorial, and 5% of federal custodial admissions were females (Malakieh, 2018). However, Indigenous males took up 28% of custodial admissions whereas Indigenous females accounted for 42% of custodial admissions (Malakieh, 2018).

Similarly, black people have also been overrepresented in Canadian prisons. Unlike Indigenous people, Statistics Canada does not provide data in their annual reports on the number of black people in federal and provincial prisons on an average day. As such Owusu-Bempah et al. (2021) research looked at the incarceration rates on black people from a 2010 Ontario Census dataset where black people accounted for 7.2% of federal offenders in 2018-2019 whilst only representing 3.5% of the population in Canada. Further, in 2010, Black women were three times more likely to be incarcerated than White women whereas Black men were five times more likely to be incarcerated than White men (Owusu-Bempah et al., 2021).

Children's Perception of the Criminal Justice System

In Powell et al. (2007) study on children aged 5-8, children were asked to comment on what their thoughts of police officers were. A central theme in 97% of children's answers was the disciplinary role of police officers such as arresting the 'bad' people. Within this theme, 20% of children reported that police officers hurt others and used words such as killing, hurting, and bashing other people. However, children also described police officers as having a protective role. When asked if they wanted to be a police officer, 40% of the younger children and 49% of the older children stated *no* as they viewed the punitive and violent aspects of policing as negative. Lastly, approximately, 31% of children had direct personal interaction with police officers, with 21% of that being police visits to the classroom for education purposes.

Further, in Fine et al. (2009) research, they found that youth who were of colour were more likely to come into contact the justice system than white youth were and thus those of colour described the procedures used by legal authorities as unfair. Fine et al. (2009) also noted that high poverty areas tended to be police differently as they experienced a disproportionate amount of unjust police tactics, and thus those children also had a more negative view of police officials. However, studies have shown that children do exhibit an obedience-based perspective in which legal authorities and the law are forces that a child must obey (Fine et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2007). Additionally, Hannem and Leonardi (2015) noted that children often lack information of the criminal justice process, their roles and rights in the process and as such perceive the justice system as negative. Children nor do families know what to expect when their incarcerated loved one is going through the criminal justice process and often face challenges in obtaining information. Based on this, children may have positive or negative views on the criminal justice system based on what their experience is with the criminal justice system.

Effects of Parental Incarceration on Children and Families

Existing literature has consistently shown that parental incarceration negatively affects children. Specifically, the range of effects experienced by children ultimately depends on the child's age when their parent was incarcerated, the strength of the parent-child relationship before and during incarceration, the length of separation, available supports, and how familiar they are with their new caregiver (Martin, 2017; Merenstein et al., 2011). Studies have suggested that children are more likely to experience stigma, antisocial behaviours, mental health problems, drug use, poverty, and poorer educational performance due to parental incarceration (Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver, n.d.; Murphey & Cooper, 2015; Murray et al., 2012).

Furthermore, studies reveal that children with an incarcerated father often live with their mother (Brown & Gibbons, 2018; Withers & Folson, 2007). In comparison, children with an incarcerated mother often live with grandparents or relatives (Brown & Gibbons, 2018; Withers & Folson, 2007). Additionally, Denby (2012) illustrated that on average, children experience up to three caregiver changes throughout parental incarceration. However, regardless of the changes to their caregivers, a child's resiliency and how they cope may also alleviate the effects of parental incarceration (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Therefore, the following effects will be examined: emotional and psychological health, delinquent behaviours, relationship with the incarcerated parent, educational performance, resilience, and stigma.

Emotional and Psychological Health

First, children of parental incarceration can experience several negative emotional and psychological health effects. Children may exhibit emotional distress such as anxiety, anger, fear, sadness, and resentment (Merenstein et al., 2011). Other studies suggest that children may display signs of anxiety and fear impending the release of an incarcerated parent (Nesmith &

Ruhland, 2008). For instance, children who had an abusive father were fearful for their mother and wanted to protect their mother upon their father's release (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). In addition, children may show signs of mental illness, including depression, eating and sleeping disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and lower levels of self-esteem (Merenstein et al., 2011; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Purvis, 2013). A study completed by Purvis (2013), for example, found that 75% of children of incarcerated parents reported signs of trauma-related stress. Another study reported that children were likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder when they witnessed their parent's criminal activity or subsequent arrest (Hardy, 2018).

In the absence of proper supports, children of incarcerated parents may also exhibit reactive behaviours such as sexualized behaviour, physical and verbal aggression, and withdrawal (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). These negative effects may also disrupt the child's development and loss of speech and language can occur, along with other developmental disabilities (Brown & Gibbons, 2018; Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver, n.d.; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Purvis, 2013). A study done on agency staff working with children of parental incarceration indicated that staff believe children have a hard time accepting their parent's crime and cannot cope with the separation of their parents (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

Delinquent Behaviour

In addition to the mental health problems outlined above, studies have shown that parental incarceration can be associated with delinquent behaviours such as the increased risk of drug and alcohol use and abuse, criminality, and delinquency (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Wildeman et al., 2018). Some studies, for example, have found that children of parental incarceration have increased chances of engaging in criminal activity and gang involvement, both short term and long term (Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver, n.d.; Murray et al.,

2012; Turnovic et al., 2012). Children of incarcerated parents may also exhibit delinquent behaviours due to the stigma and label that comes with parental incarceration (Hardy, 2018). Thus, children may adopt a delinquent identity and take after their incarcerated parent. Hardy (2018) further suggested that these children may inevitably engage in a long-term pattern of criminality well into adulthood.

Not surprisingly then, some children of parental incarceration can also have an increased risk of becoming incarcerated themselves (Purvis, 2013). Studies have shown that children of parental incarceration are six times more likely to be incarcerated and those with incarcerated mothers are more likely to be incarcerated themselves than those who have an incarcerated father (Martin, 2017).

Relationship with the Incarcerated Parent

Some children experience numerous challenges when adapting to life with an incarcerated parent. First, children who lose a parent to incarceration are not afforded the same supports as those who lose a parent to death or divorce (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). There are few to no formal community supports offered to children (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010; Phillips & Gates, 2011). Further, research on Canadian families of prisoners compare the separation as “like a death” in the sense that the prisoner is facing a lengthy sentence and as such families feel a lack of support for their loss and grief (Hannem & Leonardi, 2015). In addition, some research suggests that children with an incarcerated parent experience what has been referred to as ambiguous loss. Specifically, ambiguous loss, also known as an unclear loss, refers to a parent being physically absent but psychologically present or a parent being physically present but psychologically absent (Boss, 2007). To reduce the impact of ambiguous loss, Hardy’s (2018)

research suggests children should remain in contact with their incarcerated parent and visiting them regularly will result in positive outcomes for the child.

However, the relationship a child may have while their parent is incarcerated depends on the relationship that existed before incarceration (Martin, 2017). For example, Martin (2017) revealed that if the parent-child relationship was positive before incarceration, and the child still maintained contact throughout incarceration, it promoted a positive relationship for children and their incarcerated parent. Further, Hannem and Leonardi (2015) suggested that children and families are more likely to maintain contact and have a positive relationship with the incarcerated parent if they express an understanding on the impact that their incarceration had on the child's and families' lives. On the other hand, if a child had no relationship with their incarcerated parent prior to incarceration, children were less likely to have a positive parent-child relationship. In addition, children who have a poor relationship with their parents before incarceration may be strained with awkward phone calls that consist of superficial conversations and not meaningful conversations (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

Consequently, Merenstein et al. (2011) suggested that children who do not have a role model displayed trust issues due to being let down by their incarcerated parents and do not have that positive role model that most children need. Similarly, Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) asked children to identify their role model, and most boys named their mother or close relatives. However, none of them were able to name a male role model (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Thus, a positive relationship between the child and incarcerated parent must have existed prior to incarceration for children to benefit and not experience as many negative effects.

Educational Performance

Another finding in the research suggest that a child's educational performance may also be impacted due to parental incarceration. Studies have revealed that children may face academic difficulties and may be at a disadvantage in their cognitive and non-cognitive skills (Denby, 2012; Purvis, 2013; Turney & Haskins, 2014). For example, Turney and Haskins (2014) found that teachers who were aware of their student's parental incarceration were more likely to lower their educational expectations which influenced how teachers assessed their students. The same study found that children who experience incarceration for the first time between ages one to five years were more likely to be retained between kindergarten to grade three compared to children who did not have an incarcerated parent. In addition, a child's academic performance may suffer due to physical aggression and difficulty in concentration (Merenstein et al., 2011).

On the other hand, studies have demonstrated that parental incarceration had little to no effect on a child's academic performance (Hardy, 2018). Furthermore, a study that examined the lived experiences of children showed that 53% of children excelled in school whereas the other 47% indicated that they were doing okay in school (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Similarly, Murray et al. (2012) concluded that there was zero or only weak associations between parental incarceration and educational performance.

Resilience

As noted above, some children of parental incarceration struggle with many difficult challenges; however, studies have suggested that children have strong resilience (Hardy, 2018; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Yet these high levels of resilience can depend on how they manage and cope. For instance, those with strong, supportive people, resources to help them cope, and healthy outlets, allowed them to demonstrate strong resilience (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Studies have shown that the most common ways for children to cope is to be involved in theatre,

church, and extracurricular activities such as boxing (Hardy, 2018; Kautz, 2017). Further, children who turned to church as an outlet had a safe place to release their negative effects and process their emotions (Kautz, 2017). Resilient children were more likely to view their lives on a more positive note and had positive views about their parents being released than those who were not as resilient (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

Moreover, Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) found that children often took on the roles of an adult for their incarcerated parent. The children showed signs of appreciation, empathy, and even expressed concerns for their caregiver. For example, when a child was asked if he could change anything about his family, he stated he wished his mom was not as fragile as he was concerned about her well-being. Although some children may experience negative effects from parental incarceration, it is evident that children can adapt to the current situation through strong levels of resilience.

Stigma

An area of particular concern, research shows that children of incarcerated parents often experience stigma and shame due to their parent's actions (Brown & Gibbons, 2018). It is evident that families of prisoners' experience stigmatization from others which contributes to the negative effects that are linked with parental incarceration (Knudsen, 2016; Wildeman et al., 2018). Since the community in which the child and their families live may not validate or acknowledge the loss of the incarcerated parent, children often have a hard time expressing their grief and thus experience ambiguous loss, as noted previously (Brown & Gibbons, 2018; Hardy, 2018). On the other hand, children and families may also experience stigma from the people working in the criminal justice system such as lawyers, correctional officers, and police officers as those criminal justice officials may treat the family how they would the prisoner/offender

(Hannem & Leonardi, 2015). Thus, children and family may not view the criminal justice system as positive as they believe they contributed to the stigma. This mistrust in the criminal justice system may prevent children and their families from accessing support to cope with the stigma.

As a way to cope with the stigma that they experience, children often distance themselves from their incarcerated parent or keep their parental incarceration a secret (Brown & Gibbons, 2018; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Children of parental incarceration often desire privacy and confidentiality (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Most children are aware of the stigma surrounding parental incarceration and will choose to remain private about it or reveal the situation to someone who they trust (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Children who disclosed the truth about their parental incarceration were either teased and rejected by peers and experienced stigma or were able to find other children in a similar situation and established support and friendships in those children (Brown & Gibbons, 2018; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Phillips & Gates, 2011). In addition, community members who are aware of the parental incarceration may not allow their child to play with the child of parental incarceration (Coulthard, 2010).

Researchers have noted that teachers who are aware of the parental incarceration, often lower expectations and stigmatize the children which helps explain the child's grade retention and their struggles with school such as class non-attendance, and school phobias (Brown & Gibbons, 2018; Turney & Haskins, 2014). Nesmith and Ruhland (2008), found that children who did suffer from stigma and isolation were able to locate supportive resources to manage, however, most were not able to find a role model, were unable to connect with others or find people who they could trust to help them feel less marginalized.

On the other hand, caregivers may try to protect their child's health and deceive them about their parent's incarceration (Purvis, 2013). This scenario is more likely if the child is

younger and for those who may not understand what parental incarceration is (Purvis, 2013). Studies have noted that deceiving the child about their parent's incarceration ultimately leads to distrust, shame, confusion, and hatred (Purvis, 2013; Phillips & Gates, 2011). Caregivers are encouraged to explain parental incarceration to the child; however, they often lack the supports on how to tell them and how to help them cope with the news (Phillips & Gates, 2011). In another scenario, caregivers who told their child to keep the parental incarceration a secret, caused the child to experience further isolation, loneliness, and shame (Coulthard, 2010). Lastly, Phillips and Gates (2011) noted that families who did or did not disclose information regarding parental incarceration knew that there was more or less stigma attached to certain crimes committed by the parent.

Further, children who experience stigma due to their parental incarceration have an internal experience of stigma in which they have an internal driver where they fear might go off and make them commit a crime (Saunders, 2018). Due to this internal driver, children may experience fear in which they believe they will be like their incarcerated parent (Saunders, 2018). Thus, if children did not have an incarcerated parent, some of them would not have this perception of themselves and believe that they would commit a crime as their parent did. Notably, Cochran et al. (2018) found that children with incarcerated parents internalized their parent's felony label and began to see themselves as the future felon or the prisoner's kid. As such, the child essentially stigmatizes themselves due to their bond with their incarcerated parent and thus internally holds onto this courtesy membership as an internal driver in which they will be like their incarcerated parent. Therefore, the stigma that is attached to parental incarceration can often lead to feelings of shame and secrecy, which further debilitate the child's well-being.

Supports for Children of Incarcerated Parents and its Effectiveness

According to existing research, children who maintain a relationship with their incarcerated parents are less likely to experience many of the long-term negative effects discussed in the previous section (Bartol & Bartol, 2008; Brown et al., 2019; Hardy, 2018). This section will address the available supports for children with an incarcerated parent and identify any gaps in these supports. First, Article 3 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* will be explored as the starting foundation for providing supports for children. Second, the ways in which the community can help children of parental incarceration will be reviewed. Third, methods of maintaining contact between the parent and child will be examined as currently, in Canada, children are able to maintain their relationship with their incarcerated parents through written correspondence, phone calls, or prison visitations (Martin, 2017). Afterward, research on the effectiveness of programs such as Nutmeg Big Brothers Big Sisters, Families in Crisis, and Mother-Child Program will be examined. Lastly, bibliotherapy will be reviewed as another support for children of parental incarceration.

According to *Convention of the Rights of the Child*, Article 3 states, “in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.” (UN General Assembly, 1990). Therefore, when looking at policies that can be implemented for children, policies should address the children’s needs at the time of sentencing and changing prison visitation policies to be more child-friendly (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

It is important to note that one study on incarcerated mothers found that participants felt that Canada was not following the guidelines of the Convention (Brennan, 2014). Nesmith and

Ruhland (2008) also found that in the United States, the current policies did not reflect the Convention. To address this concern, researchers have recommended inserting some sort of family plan into the sentencing process or look at non-custodial sentencing possibilities as a way to address the needs of the child (Knudsen, 2016; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). For example, Knudsen (2016) suggested probation, house arrest, intermittent sentences, electrical monitoring, and curfews as a few alternatives to custodial sentences when possible. In addition, upon sentencing the parent, the courts could also consider the distance of the correctional facility to the child's home to address the financial and transportation barriers of families visiting (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Additionally, one study suggested that the lack of contact that mothers face could be due to the distance of the correctional facility from their family home (Martin & Tole, 2017). Thus, policies should be considering the best interest of a child to reduce the potential harms that children may face.

Next, community action to address the needs of children of parental incarceration could include more public awareness, finding mentors and/or role models for children, and increased collaboration between the services that are supporting these children (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). It has been established that educating the community on the topic of children and parental incarceration and their needs may help reduce some of the effects such as stigma that children experience (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Evidently, children who kept their parent's incarceration a secret experienced more anxiety and worried about the secret being revealed. Thus, increasing public awareness on the topic may reduce the stigma and open up new community resources for the child (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Additionally, support groups for children of parental incarceration are recommended (Springer et al., 2000). Support groups can help reduce the

feelings of shame as other children will have had similar experiences and can offer confirmation, acceptance, and affirmations to the child while providing a social aspect (Springer et al., 2000).

Methods of Contact

Policymakers have tried to make it easier for children to maintain a relationship with their incarcerated parents by offering phone calls, mailing letters, and visitation. A study noted 52% of incarcerated parents received monthly mail from their child, 38% of children called their incarcerated parent monthly and in-person visits were rare due to the associated costs of visiting and feelings of discomfort (Martin, 2017). However, all three types of contact have their benefits and consequences.

First, children are able to write letters to their parents, and as often as they want. There is no limit as to how much or how often an inmate can receive mail (Correctional Service Canada, 2019). However, prisoners must pay for any postage costs to send a letter out (Correctional Service Canada, 2019). Another method to maintain a parent-child relationship is phone calls. Prisoners essentially have two ways to call their loved ones. First, prisoners have a Smart card which allows them to access funds from their account and have a minimum balance of \$80 to call someone (Correctional Service Canada, 2019). Second, if an inmate does not have the funds to make a phone call, they can make a collect call instead, where the recipient pays for the phone call (Correctional Service Canada, 2019). In 2013, Bell Canada announced that they are the new provider for managing the offender telephone management system (OTMS) (Benslimane et al., 2019). The OTMS caps phone calls at 20 minutes and recipients must have a landline or a cellphone to accept the call (Benslimane et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, lack of money and access to a billable landline or cell phone may be a barrier to children and their caregivers. A 20-minute long-distance phone call can cost families

almost \$30 as recipients are forced to pay \$2.50 to accept a call and up to \$1.33 per minute (Benslimane et al., 2019). A study reported financial stress as one of the most common sources that caregivers – those taking care of the child whilst their parents are incarcerated – experience (Knudsen, 2016). One mother shared her experience of having a phone bill of \$837.72 for 36 calls (Benslimane et al., 2019). As such, Hannem and Leonardi (2015) suggested eliminating or reducing the costs of phone calls so that families can afford to maintain contact via phone calls.

Next, there are four types of visitations. First, open visits allow direct, supervised contact between the inmate and visitor (Correctional Service Canada, 2019). Second, closed visits involve a physical barrier between the inmate and visitor (Correctional Service Canada, 2019). Third, video visitation provides an alternative visit via virtual technology when in-person visits are not doable (Correctional Service Canada, 2019). A study done in Australia revealed that issues regarding phone calls, visitation, and finances were combatted with video-conferencing (Purvis, 2013). Video-conferencing was closely monitored by staff, however, it was more accessible for those children and caregivers who lived remotely (Purvis, 2013). In addition, prisoners were able to record themselves reading to their children (Purvis, 2013). Fourth, private family visits (PFV) allow prisoners to spend time with their family in private, in a separate room within the confines of prison that includes a kitchen, beds, TV, and children's toys, up to 72 hours, every two months (Correctional Service Canada, 2019; Knudsen, 2016). Studies suggest that PFV strengthens and maintains the relationship between the family and the inmate incarcerated (Derkzen et al., 2009; Vacheret, 2005). PFV is appreciated by most families and most families often look forward to the next visit (Knudsen, 2016).

In addition, Vacheret (2005) noted that PFV allows the family and inmate to recreate a shared living situation by preparing meals and doing activities together which reinforced the

emotional and family ties. PFV allows the incarcerated parent to resume their parental role and help with their child's education, night routine such as tucking their child into bed and teaching them activities (Vacheret, 2005). Thus, PFV is beneficial to children as it allows some normalcy of having a mother or father back in their lives, for a short-time period.

Comparatively, research by Nesmith and Ruhland, (2008) noted that children listed three reasons for not visiting their incarcerated parent: first, their caregiver did not allow them to visit their incarcerated parent, second, the children did not want to visit their incarcerated parent and lastly, the caregiver and child did not have the proper documentation to visit or lacked the necessary information on how to go about visiting. Children who did visit their parents in prison often felt fear (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Among the reasons cited in the study, children often felt fear due to the appearance of prison, with one child mentioning that he did not feel safe during the visits, and others felt fear on the drive to prison (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Murray et al. (2012) noted that prisons were not child-friendly due to waiting times, all the security measures, and policies where prisoners are not to physically touch their visitors.

Research has also shown that when visiting, children are more likely to cause fewer disruptions when they have toys as well as activities to do with their incarcerated parent and when their parent and child are able to roam freely and have physical contact (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Due to prisons not being child-friendly, children often find visitation distressing (Murray et al., 2012). Martin (2017) indicated that children who do visit their incarcerated parent may experience secondary prisonization - when children compare their visitation experience to doing time in prison as they are experiencing physical confinement, restrictive rules, and higher security checks – due to the prison appearance and not the visitation itself (Knudsen, 2016; Murphey & Cooper, 2015). Similarly, Hannem and Leonardi (2015) noted that non-contact

visits, restrictions on touching and movement, and the prison environment may cause children to perceive the experience as scary, distressing, and hostile which may have a negative impact on the child's relationship with their incarcerated parent.

Although studies propose visitation to be beneficial, it is evident that children may experience awkwardness, frustration, and are afraid upon visitations (Clopton & East, 2008). In addition, children may experience more behavioural reactions after a weekend of visiting the incarcerated parent due to the long-distance traveling and lengthy wait-times to see the parent (Clopton & East, 2008). Thus, children may not be focused on school after a weekend visit. Notably, caregivers often experience financial struggles due to the location of the prison and thus visits might not be regular. To combat this, there have been a few programs such as "Fostering, Empowering, Advocating, Together" (FEAT) for Children of Incarcerated Parents that enabled funding for regular transportation services on the weekends to allow for more consistent parent-child visits (FEAT for Children of Incarcerated Parents, 2012). Likewise, in Canada, there was an organization called Bridge House which was forced to shut down in 2010, but was one of the only resources that provided low cost accommodations to families visiting their incarcerated loved ones (Hannem & Leonardi, 2015). Overall, there are both benefits and consequences to private family visits.

Existing Supports for Children of Incarcerated Parents

Another approach to assisting children of incarcerated parents has been the provision of mentoring services. Programs such as Nutmeg Big Brothers Big Sisters and Families in Crisis provide mentoring services for children and support services for the children and their families, respectively (Merenstein et al., 2011). Several studies support the effectiveness of offering mentoring services or extended family support. For instance, Merenstein et al., (2011) found that

caregivers agreed that having a mentor for their child helped with the child opening up more about their feelings. However, Hannem and Leonardi (2015) noted that services for Canadian children are difficult to locate as age-appropriate counselling or play therapy was hard to come by.

Next, Canada has a mother-child program, which allows children up to the age of four to reside with their incarcerated mother full-time. For those children aged five to 12, the programs allow them to reside with their incarcerated mother part-time, including weekends and holidays (Brennan, 2014). To date, one evaluation study has examined these residence programs and noted that several obstacles adversely impacted their implementation. Brennan (2014) found that there was a lack of enrollment in the program due to overcrowding, a punitive correctional environment, and eligibility to the program were often changed, making it harder for children to be with their mothers.

Research on the program and the effects on children were not thoroughly mentioned in this study, but more so focused on the views of the mothers. For instance, the incarcerated mothers noted that if they were at the time sharing a cell with an inmate who had committed an offence against a child would not be eligible to participate in the mother-child program (Brennan, 2014). All incarcerated mothers noted how important it was for them to maintain their relationship with their child and how critical it was for the child's development (Brennan, 2014). It was revealed that no relationship between the mother and the child would in fact cause future problems for both the incarcerated mother and the child (Brennan, 2014). Lastly, one mother did not see benefits from the mother-child program as she explained that the prison environment was not sterile, nor conducive to support the healthy development of a child. Although there is no information regarding how this mother-child program can help reduce the impact that children

face, it is recommended that the mother-child relationship is critical to the child's development. Although programs such as Nutmeg Big Brothers Big Sisters, Families in Crisis, and Mother-Child Program proved to benefit the child, there are still limitations to each program and the long-term effects of parental incarceration on children are not known.

Bibliotherapy

Briefly, bibliotherapy refers to the idea of sharing books or stories that are intended to help others gain insight into personal issues (Heath et al., 2005). Amongst its purposes, bibliotherapy is intended to help children recognize that they are not alone in their thoughts and experiences and to observe others in similar situations from an emotionally safer distance (Hames & Pedreira, 2003). It is also intended to help with emotional healing and growth (Heath et al., 2005). Numerous studies found that stories and books are beneficial in gaining insight into personal problems, aid in creating a safe distance, allow children to process their thoughts and feelings, learn problem-solving skills, have hope for their situation, and help bring the child indirectly into more sensitive issues that may be too painful to face directly (Heath et al., 2005; Hames & Pedreira, 2003; Warren et al., 2019). For instance, bibliotherapy has been used in numerous settings to address issues that children face such as divorce, death of a loved one, adoption, parental unemployment, and parental incarceration (Heath et al., 2005; Reimer, 2019; Schlafer & Scignoli, 2015). In relation, Schlafer & Scignoli (2015) found that books on parental incarceration provided an avenue for caregivers and professionals to initiate a conversation with the child as to why their parent was incarcerated and what incarceration was.

Several studies have shown that bibliotherapy aids in decreasing fear and anxiety in children, improves reading skills, develops strong relationships with peers and the community as well as improves one's self-concept and social skills (Heath et al., 2005; Warren et al., 2019).

Additionally, the content in the books such as the plot or the characters encouraged the child to ask questions about their own feelings and experiences. These feelings and experiences range from being scared of witnessing their parent's arrest or feeling upset as to why their parent missed important life events (Shlafer & Scignoli, 2015). More specifically, children may also relate to the book's characters and feel as if they are not alone as well as have decreased feelings of being stigmatized and ashamed (Shlafer & Scignoli, 2015; Heath et al., 2005). Hames & Pedreira (2003) notes that the main reason for using bibliotherapy is to generate a comfortable discussion between the child and the caregiver or professional. Thus, Hames & Pedreira (2003) encourages caregivers and professionals to stop reading when the child interrupts to comment on the story. Other studies have revealed that when bibliotherapy is the only tool used in aiding children, that it is not as therapeutic (Heath et al., 2005). These studies showed no significant improvement in children's social skills, nor did they have any effect on decreasing stress and anxiety (Heath et al., 2005).

Moreover, Reimer (2019) revealed that children are able to develop empathy towards children of incarcerated parents. Reimer wrote a picture book called "Sammy's Visit" in which Sammy goes to visit her mother in jail and Reimer read the book to three groups of 5-6 children. Reimer found that all the participants expressed empathy towards Sammy and that each group understood poverty and incarceration differently. It was revealed that groups one and two were more familiar with the ideas of incarceration and poverty whereas group three relied on the more stereotypical ideas of incarceration and poverty. Next, all groups acknowledged that Sammy's feelings of separation were similar to the group's feelings that come from having a loved one pass away (most children mentioned losing their pets). Overall, Reimer found that children's books aid in developing greater understanding among children who are not personally impacted

by parental incarceration which leads to developing empathy towards children who are impacted by parental incarceration.

Although bibliotherapy can be beneficial, it also needs to include and promote a variety of cultural groups in order to help readers learn about cultural traditions, lessons, and morals to help aid a diverse group of readers in fostering thinking and self-awareness (Ford et al., 2018). By including more diverse groups of people such as those who are Indigenous, black, and of colour, it will help readers see themselves in the books as well as promote and protect their self-esteem and racial identity.

Nonetheless, Heath et al., (2005) note that caregivers and professionals should consider three things when using bibliotherapy. First, they must monitor the child's progress to document treatment efficacy. Second, bibliotherapy should be used as another resource and not as the sole intervention. Lastly, caregivers and professionals must carefully select the books with topics that are sensitive to the child's experiences as well as appropriately address the child's emotional needs (Heath et al., 2005; Schlafer & Scignoli, 2015). As such, caregivers and professionals need to read the books beforehand to make sure they are appropriate for the child. Thus, bibliotherapy allows caregivers and professionals an opportunity to facilitate sensitive conversations with children in a way that encourages them to express their feelings and promote healthy coping mechanisms in a safer and familiar environment. Ultimately, I will be examining the content of children's books written for children of incarcerated parents to see whether the content of the children's books seeks to counteract the stigmatizing process and provide strategies to help children better deal with stigma and cope with parental incarceration.

Chapter Three: Parental Incarceration and Stigma Theory

In this section, I will outline stigma theory to shed light on one of the collateral consequences of having a parent incarcerated, as stigma theory will provide a lens through which to analyze the content in the children's books on parental incarceration. Specifically, stigma is often one of the collateral consequences that children face when they experience parental incarceration.

According to Goffman (1986), stigma refers to any social or physical attribute or sign that diminishes a person's social identity as to disqualify them from complete social acceptance. In his original work, Goffman identified three types of stigma: physical defects, personal blemishes on individual background or character, and tribal stigmas. Of particular interest to the present study, tribal stigma referred to blemishes that could be transmitted through family lineages.

Goffman's stigma theory posits that society categorizes a person based on normative understandings of what is acceptable.

As such, stigma can be broken down into three categories: *the stigmatized* (those who have the stigma), *the normal* (those who do not have the stigma), and *the wise* (people who are *normal* but are accepted by the *stigmatized* as "wise") (Goffman, 1986). Further, stigmatization is a process in which a stigmatized person's first appearance enables another person to anticipate the category and attribute to which category that stigmatized person would belong. Goffman referred to this as an individual's social identity. Next, societal anticipation of a stigmatized individual transforms into normative expectations. Goffman explained that these normative expectations are like demands that society has placed on others. Furthermore, individuals are not aware of these demands until a situation arises that determines whether or not these normative demands are being met. When normative demands are not met, an individual is stigmatized because they are judged negatively in terms of the social category into which they have been

placed - they are not judged on their individual character. Thus, the attribute that is given to the stigmatized individual is discrediting.

The Concept of Wise Persons and Courtesy Stigma

One of the many collateral consequences of parental incarceration is the possibility that the stigma attached to the parent may be 'passed on' to children. Goffman's concept of a wise person and courtesy stigma may aid in explaining children's experiences with parental incarceration. First, Goffman (1986) defined the concept of a wise person as a person who is defined or perceived as normal but whose special situation has made them connected to the stigmatized individual. This normal person, according to societal standards, can then find themselves subjected to the same measure of acceptance or "courtesy membership" to the stigmatized individual. For example, when the stigmatized individual is with the normal person, they feel no shame nor do they need to exercise self-control. This normal person has accepted the stigmatized individual for their faults and sees them as an ordinary person. However, in contrast society does not see the relationship between the normal person and the stigmatized individual as normative and may stigmatize the normal person for their relationship with the stigmatized individual.

As mentioned previously, Goffman noted that the wise person is regarded as *normal*, but that it is their relationship with a stigmatized person that makes them a *wise* person. Second, the normal person must have sympathy towards the stigmatized individual and make themselves available to the stigmatized. As a result, the normal person is now accepted as a courtesy member of the stigmatized, and the implications of this acceptance are such that children fear being identified as just like their incarcerated mother or father and are, as a result, seen as guilty by association (Luther, 2016).

Moreover, Goffman (1986) introduced two types of wise person. The first type of wise person is one whose wisdom comes from being employed at an establishment where they have direct contact with the stigmatized individual. The second type of wise person is one who may be related to the stigmatized individual through a social structure such as a family bond. This relationship that the wise person has to the stigmatized individual eventually leads to society treating both individuals as one person in which both are stigmatized. As an example, Goffman noted that the daughter (a loyal person) of an incarcerated father (the stigmatized individual) would experience some of the discredit of the stigmatized individual due to their parent-child relationship. This is significant as it suggests that children of parental incarceration are stigmatized due to their association with their incarcerated parent and not because of other contributing factors such as having an incarcerated parent not being the norm in today's society. This also does not require that children and parents be in close proximity, rather a child can be discredited simply by others knowing about the familial connection. The spreading of stigma from one stigmatized individual to their close connections to family or friends is the reason why some individuals avoid or end the relationship to the incarcerated to prevent further stigmatization.

Stigmatization and Parental Incarceration

The stigma surrounding children of parental incarceration is harmful as literature has shown that it negatively impacts the child. It is important to examine the stigma that children of parental incarceration experience to determine what types of supports are required for them and to better understand what they experience. Phillips and Gates (2011) provided a conceptual framework for understanding the process of stigmatization of children of parental incarceration. This process consisted of five significant elements which include: distinguishing and labeling

differences, combining labeled differences with negative attributes, differentiating between “us” and “them” based on the labeled differences, the devaluation and discriminatory treatment of the labeled individuals, and lastly, all of the above occurring within the context of perpetuating differences in political, social, economic and cultural power. The first element, distinguishing and labeling differences, refers to the differences that an individual has through the process of stigmatization. Children of parental incarceration are not stigmatized by any trait that they personally have themselves, but are often stigmatized due to their relationship with their parents who are stigmatized but does not require them to be close in proximity.

Further, the second element, combining labeled differences with negative attributes refers to the degree to which the differences are negatively perceived (Phillips & Gates, 2011). This negative perception can be persuaded by factors such as concealing the differences if the differences promote feelings of threat or fear and the view that the individual is responsible for their stigma (Phillips & Gates, 2011). Children are able to avoid further stigma or stigmatization by concealing their stigmatized differences (Phillips & Gates, 2011). However, one of the many outcomes of being stigmatized may result in stress and further isolation for the child if they are unable to disclose their parent’s incarceration to family or friends (Phillips & Gates, 2011). Further, by concealing their stigmatized differences, children may miss out on further supports to help them cope (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Phillips & Gates, 2011). On the other hand, children may choose to disclose the truth to those they trust or may find others in similar situations (Phillips & Gates, 2011).

Next, society may have negative attitudes surrounding these differences that children face due to the belief that they pose a threat and are responsible for the differences (Phillips & Gates, 2011). For example, families appear to understand that some crimes are more stigmatizing than

others such as being imprisoned for a drug offence versus rape (Phillips & Gates, 2011). As mentioned previously, children may be viewed as a threat in that it is thought that they might end up like their parents (Luther, 2017; Phillips & Gates, 2011), and as such may be a bad influence on other children whose parents are not incarcerated.

The third element, differentiating between “us” and “them” is based on the labeled differences refers to individuals who may have characteristics that place them in multiple stigmatized groups (Phillips & Gates, 2011). One stigmatized difference may have negative attributions such as stigmatization from having a disease that can concretize negative attributions on other stigmatized differences such as race (Phillips & Gates, 2011). Thus, children may be stigmatized due to their parent’s incarceration but also be further stigmatized for their race (Phillips & Gates, 2011). Next, the fourth element, the devaluation and discriminatory treatment of the labeled individuals refers to the demotion to a lower social status (Phillips & Gates, 2011). For example, Phillips and Gates (2011) noted that children face devaluation from multiple sources which include: getting teased by parents, and differential treatments from teachers and churches reinforcing the idea that the children are morally wrong.

Lastly, the fifth element of stigmatization is unable to occur without differences in political, social, economic, and cultural power (Phillips & Gates, 2011). The fifth element involves the idea that for a group to be stigmatized, those who stigmatize must have the power for their views of the stigmatized group to matter and have a negative impact (Phillips & Gates, 2011). Ultimately, Phillips and Gates (2011) revealed that the process of stigmatization has relevance to children of parental incarceration.

Summary and Present Study

To summarize, approximately 357, 604 children are affected by parental incarceration (Withers & Folsom, 2007). Current research indicates that children of parental incarceration experience a range of negative outcomes such as but not limited to: emotional and psychological health, increased risk of delinquent behaviour, poorer or stronger relationships with the incarcerated parent depending on how the child's relationship with the incarcerated parent was prior to incarceration, poorer educational performance, strong resilience and effects of stigma and shame.

Moreover, the literature has revealed that children are able to alleviate the consequences of parental incarceration by maintaining contact with their incarcerated parent via visits, phone calls, and letter writing. Although these are ways to maintain contact, research shows that it can also be costly (Knudsen, 2016). Other supports include attending programs such as Nutmeg Big Brothers Big Sisters, Families in Crisis, and Mother-Child Program. In spite of some of the positive changes associated with these programs, existing research suggests that the influence of these roles models may be temporary and the program settings may not be ideal for children (Brennan, 2014; Merenstein et al., 2011). The last resource examined was bibliotherapy in which research found that the idea of sharing books or stories of parental incarceration helped others to gain more knowledge into parental incarceration and develop empathy for those experiencing it (Heath et al., 2005; Reimer, 2019). More specifically, Heath et al. (2005) and Reimer (2019) research singled out bibliotherapy as having a great deal of potential benefit for children.

As such, my study examined a sample of children's books written as a resource for children of incarcerated parents as well as caregiver and adult support persons. Specifically, the present study analyzed the stories and illustrations in these stories to better understand how these

resources aligned with theory. Stigma theory plays a prominent role as it will provide a helpful toolbox of concepts when theorizing the data so that I can evaluate whether, how, and to what extent the content of the children's books seeks to counteract the stigmatizing process and the kinds of strategies provided to help children deal with stigma and cope with parental incarceration.

Chapter Four: Methodology

In this section, I outline the specific research questions and methodology for this study. First, I present the research questions that will guide data collection and analysis. Next, I will outline the methodology that I have chosen and my related rationale.

Research Questions

The current research was guided by the following research questions:

1. What themes emerged in children's books regarding parental incarceration?
2. Given these themes, what appears to be the intended purpose(s) of these books?
3. What themes emerged in language when discussing incarceration and its effects on children?
4. How, if at all, do themes within children's books address experiences of stigma and courtesy stigma?
5. How, if at all, do the books offer specific strategies to help children deal with stigma and/or cope with parental incarceration.

For the purpose of this research, I used a content analysis, which is a method of analyzing textual data that can be quantitative and qualitative in nature (Hsieh & Shannon, 2016).

Specifically, a quantitative content analysis focuses on the frequencies of themes found in the content and assigning them a numerical value, whereas a qualitative content analysis focuses more on observing and analyzing the themes found in the content (Riffe et al., 2005; Hsieh & Shannon, 2016). For this research, I focused on a qualitative aspect of a content analysis as I was more interested in analyzing what the latent meanings were behind the emerging themes.

Furthermore, a qualitative content analysis focused on the language that was being communicated through the content or contextual meaning of the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2016).

Specifically, the content was not limited to the words being communicated but also included the images in the content. This content was then coded to identify themes or patterns that emerged from the texts and to analyze the latent meanings that were being examined. Accordingly, a qualitative content analysis is an appropriate method to employ while examining books. By examining the language and illustrations in books, and further coding them into categories that signify similar meanings, one can then understand the themes or patterns of the content. Thus, this research analyzed the content of books written for children who have an incarcerated parent.

In addition, for data analysis, the study employed constructivist grounded theorizing. Briefly, constructivist grounded theorizing attempts to discover or construct conceptual frameworks or theories by analyzing data in an inductive, comparative, emergent, and open-ended method. It involved checking in on the theoretical interpretations of the data by comparing the data to each other. Hence, the researcher's analytic categories emerged from the data. Constructivist grounded theorizing prefers analysis over description, systemically focused sequential data collection over large initial samples, and fresh categories over preconceived ideas and extant theory. It also allowed me to analyze data while collecting the data, making the data collection and analysis an iterative process in that each shaped the other. Ultimately, constructivist grounded theory was used in this research when comparing and analyzing the data found within the children's books.

Sampling and Unit of Analysis

For the purposes of the current study, the unit of analysis was the children's books. For each book included in the sample, I coded the text, images, and narratives. To identify a sample of books for analysis, I used non-probability sampling techniques. Specifically, nonprobability sampling refers to a sampling process in which not all the samples have an equal chance of participating in the study (Maxfield & Babbie, 2008). For this research, I utilized a purposive sampling frame. Purposive sampling is the deliberate choice of a participant or subject due to the characteristics that the participant or subject may have (Etikan et al., 2016). This type of sampling is non-random and does not need underlying theories or a set number of subjects (Etikan et al., 2016). The selected sample is based on the researcher's knowledge of the population and its qualities and what is needed for the research being conducted (Maxfield & Babbie, 2008). In other words, the researcher gets to decide what needs to be known and will seek out participants/subjects who can provide the information needed in order to aid with the relevant research (Etikan et al., 2016).

Data Collection

First, I compiled a list of existing books regarding children with an incarcerated parent(s). To do so, I started by looking at the websites of organizations that focused on helping children with an incarcerated parent such as the Canadian Families and Corrections Network and looking at their resources to identify any children's books they may have suggested. After looking at organizations and their resources, I looked at database resources of the scholarly literature to see if other studies mentioned children's books on parental incarceration. Lastly, I looked at general search engines and employed keywords to capture any more children's books I may have missed. Keywords such as "children's books", "parental incarceration", "jail", "prison", "prison

visitation”, “maternal incarceration” and “paternal incarceration” was used in the database/general search engine searches. Once a list of children’s books was compiled, I determined which books were still in print and available for purchase. In addition, I was not looking at a specific time frame as to when these books were published as I believe it is a limited genre.

Books retrieved from the initial search were then screened using these specific criteria:

1. The story had to address an aspect of parental incarceration (for example: witnessing the arrest, coping mechanisms, visiting a prison, what prison is like, etc.) as a central part of the narrative
2. The children’s books had to be specific to parental incarceration (for example, maternal or paternal incarceration and not a relative who is incarcerated; for example, uncle/aunts or grandparents who are incarcerated)
3. The children’s books had to include illustrations
4. The target audience of the books was children. The following list is how publishers assign age groups for readers of various formats:
 - Picture books are intended for ages 3-8
 - Early, leveled readers: Ages 5-9
 - First chapter books: Ages 6-9 or 7-10
 - Middle-grade books: Ages 8-12
 - Young adult books: Ages 12+
5. Books are written in English

Coding

According to Charmaz (2006), coding is the key component between collecting data and developing theory to explain the collected data. Through coding, I was able to define what is happening within the data and what it means. By coding the data, it helped shape the analytical frame needed in order to build the analysis. The process of grounded theory coding involved two main stages: an initial-coding phase and a focused-coding phase. The next section will explore initial coding, creating a codebook, focus coding, and memo-writing.

Initial Coding

The first step in coding is to begin initial coding. Initial coding allowed me to later define what the core conceptual categories are to be (Charmaz, 2006). Some key components to initial coding include: remaining open to exploring the theoretical possibilities of the data, sticking closely to the data to ensure that pre-existing categories are not being applied, constructing short, simple, and precise codes, coding for actions, feelings, and events rather than types of people, and comparing the data with the data.

To begin this phase of coding, I began coding the children's books line-by-line. Line-by-line coding is when a code is given to each line of the written data and encourages the ability to observe patterns in the data (Charmaz, 2006). Line-by-line coding is important as it helps define implicit meanings and actions, aids in providing direction to explore and make comparisons between the data and allows the researcher to make connections between the data. Additionally, line-by-line coding encouraged me to see undetected patterns in everyday life as well as enabled me to take events apart and analyze how they occurred and what created them. Thus, the process of initial coding provided the foundation for additional data analysis that probed deeper into what the initial code suggested and what these codes indicated on a larger focus of the research.

Creating the Codebook

Following the initial coding process, each code that emerged from the line-by-line coding was noted in a separate document. I made note of the number of times that a code appeared as well as the significance that the code held. Accordingly, Charmaz (2006) suggested that assessing initial codes involves comparing them with the data and distinguishing which codes have greater analytical power. Therefore, certain initial codes were highlighted as significant whereas other codes were deemed to be not be as significant.

Throughout this process, I engaged in a pre-writing technique called clustering, which aided in sorting the initial codes into systemic groupings (Charmaz, 2006). Clustering began by writing a central idea in the middle of a document with a circle around it. Next, a spoke was drawn from the middle of that central idea to connect smaller circles of similar ideas (subcategories) to show its defining properties, the relationship, and its significance to that central idea. Ultimately, the document ended up looking like a diagram of smaller groupings of ideas that related to the central idea. Thus, clustering permitted me to observe how the pieces of the data fit together in a puzzle-like way. The codes that were then highlighted as significant were subsequently given an operationalized definition.

Focused Coding

Once initial coding and the process of creating the codebook was completed, the process of focus coding occurred. Focus coding allowed me to compare what the initial codes revealed between the other initial codes (Charmaz, 2006). Focus coding differs from initial coding as it appeared more frequently among the initial codes as well as held more significance than initial codes. Focus coding used the codes to sift, sort, synthesize, analyze, and conceptualize the data. It required me to make decisions about which initial codes held the most analytic reach to

categorize the data directly and completely. By deciding which codes held more analytical reach, it highlighted what was important in the data for the emerging analysis. Additionally, focus coding advanced the theoretical direction and is more conceptual in nature than line-by-line coding. Thus, focus coding was significant in organizing the collected data and managing the emerging analysis as the codes provide theoretical reach, direction, and centrality.

Memo-Writing

During and following focus coding, I engaged in analytic memo-writing which is defined by Charmaz (2006) as a crucial intermediate method in engaging in grounded theory as it allowed me to thoroughly analyze the collected data and how each code relates to those other focus codes. Memo-writing helped me refine my codes and allowed me to think more deeply about what each code symbolizes in order to make sure that it is representative of the data as a whole. Memo-writing aided in catching my thoughts, comparing the data and their connections, and finalizing the questions and theoretical directions I wanted to pursue. Ultimately, the process of memo-writing assisted me in transitioning from initial coding, creating the codebook, and focus coding into the next steps of developing the findings and discussion sections of this research.

Chapter Five: Results Chapter

In this chapter, I outline the analysis of the children's books on parental incarceration in order to identify the various themes that emerged. Specifically, analyses addressed the following research questions:

1. What themes emerged in children's books regarding parental incarceration?
2. Given these themes, what appears to be the intended purpose(s) of these books?
3. What themes emerged in language when discussing incarceration and its effects on children?
4. How, if at all, do themes within children's books address experiences of stigma and courtesy stigma?
5. How, if at all, do the books offer specific strategies to help children deal with stigma and/or cope with parental incarceration.

Across analyses of the sample, several common themes emerged. Specifically, four themes were identified in relation to the above questions, which included: (1) stigma, (2) experiences with the prison, (3) the parental bond, and (4) emotional and mental health. Within these four major themes, subthemes were also found, some of which include, courtesy stigma, feelings about the prison, still my parent, and coping with new situations. In the following sections, the four major themes and their related subthemes will be further explored.

Stigma Themes

One of the major themes found throughout the analysis of children's books was *stigma*. According to Goffman (1986), stigma is defined as having a social or physical feature that discredits an individual's social identity, resulting in social marginalization. During the

stigmatization process, people rely on physical appearances to place individuals into known social categories (i.e., Deviant, Non-Deviant) (Goffman, 1986). Subsequently, stigmatized individuals are judged based on the social category or identity into which they have been placed. Certain social identities, such as addiction or a criminal record, are associated with stigma. Not surprisingly, children of incarcerated parents experience stigma based on their parent's social identity. As such, in the following section, I will examine how stories included in the sample constructed stigma and its impact including the subthemes of *courtesy stigma*, *bullying*, and *reducing stigma*.

Courtesy Stigma

As previously discussed, courtesy stigma occurs when society labels an individual who is otherwise not deviant as socially unacceptable due to the person's relationship with a stigmatized individual (Goffman, 1986). As such, this section focuses on whether, how, and to what extent the children's books discussed stigma. This is an important theme as five of the children's books constructed the child's first experience of stigma as courtesy stigma. This section will therefore discuss others making comments on the child's relationship with their incarcerated parent, nicknames used to label the child, and how children fear that they will be like their incarcerated parent. Furthermore, this section will also discuss keeping parental incarceration a secret as a means to reduce the courtesy stigma experienced which is also demonstrated in five of the children's books.

First, *courtesy stigma* can be seen in the comments that other children in the stories make about the child with an incarcerated parent. For example, in *My Dad's in Prison*, courtesy stigma is demonstrated in the following text: "Logan and I were having an argument. He said I took his apple, but I didn't. Then he said I was no better than my dad" (Walter, 2018). In this example,

Logan blamed the main character for taking his apple even though they admitted that they did not take the apple. Logan then goes on to argue that the child was just like his father. Due to the child having an incarcerated parent, their classmate combined the two together and stated the child is like the incarcerated father, suggesting a courtesy stigma.

Another example from the book *Missing Daddy* shows, “my classmates laugh and make fun. They say, ‘you know, your daddy’s a criminal so that makes you one’ (Kaba, 2018). This sample further highlights courtesy stigma as again, the classmates are emphasizing the child’s relationship with their incarcerated parent as one, stating that the child is a criminal as well. As noted in the literature, peers and other members of the community believe that “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” and thus views the child as being like their incarcerated parent (Murray et al., 2012; Phillips & Gates, 2011). These excerpts also align with Luther’s (2016) concept of the child being guilty by association, also known as a courtesy membership. This courtesy membership is what society deems as bad, and thus society will stigmatize the child based on their relationship with their incarcerated parent (Goffman, 1986; Luther, 2016).

Another way in which the books constructed *courtesy stigma* among children was through the use of nicknames. That is, in one of the books, one of the children frequently referred to the main character with a nickname designed to label the child and aid in the stigmatization process. For instance, in *The Night Dad Went to Jail ... What to Expect When Someone You Love Goes to Jail*, Sketch was daydreaming when the teacher called upon them and another student yelled out, “Hey! Wake up, jailbird!” (Higgins, 2013). The use of the term *jailbird* is significant when discussing courtesy stigma as the child is not in jail. Evidently, Seward (2019) found that deviant labels like *jailbird*, *convict*, and *felon* are frequently used to describe incarcerated parents. Thus, due to the child’s relationship with their incarcerated parent, the deviant label was

extended to their social identity. When books use a nickname to refer to the child of an incarcerated parent, it is an acknowledgement of how courtesy stigma works. As such, a tool to help children cope with nicknames that aid in stigmatization, Higgins (2013) suggested children talk with a school counsellor or someone they trust, writing their feelings down or drawing pictures.

Lastly, Goffman's concept of courtesy stigma emerged through what Luther (2016) has described as a fear that one will follow the same stigmatized path as their incarcerated parent. Specifically, in two of the books, the stories described children as fearing that they would follow their incarcerated parent's path. For instance, in *What Do I Say About That? ... Coping with an Incarcerated Parent*, a child mentioned, "I start to feel scared because I know that I'm half him. What if I do the things, he has done and end up where he has been?" which highlights courtesy stigma as the child fears he might be like his father (Cook, 2015). Secondly, in *My Daddy is in Jail*, a child wondered, "If I am bad, will I go to jail too?" (Bender, 2003).

In three books included in this sample, the stories showed children fearing that they would be 'incarcerated' if they misbehaved. In other words, some stories showed children believing that 'incarceration' - if they misbehaved - was a likely punishment as a result of their shared history with an incarcerated parent. In response to the courtesy stigma and the perceived stigma that children believe is attached to parental incarceration, narratives in the sampled stories suggest that children might be told to keep the incarceration a secret by the other parent or they may respond by keeping the parental incarceration a secret themselves. For example, in *Kofi's Mom*, "Kofi's friend asked him where his mom had gone. Kofi did not want to tell him. He wanted it to be a secret. When his teacher asked Kofi where his mom was, he didn't tell her either" (Dyches, 2010b).

In summary, the subtheme of *courtesy stigma* found in the content of the sample highlights the treatment children receive from other people due to their incarcerated parent. Specifically, these books demonstrate the various forms of courtesy stigma that children may receive including nicknames, fears of incarceration as a common punishment, the fear of being incarcerated like their parent, and the practice of keeping the incarceration a secret. These situations reveal that children who have not committed a deviant act are stigmatized due to their relationship with their incarcerated parent and show that society believes that the child and the incarcerated parent are the same person.

Bullying

In this section, the subtheme of *bullying* will be explored. Briefly, bullying is defined as aggressive behaviour or intentionally causing harm to another individual that is generally done over time, repeatedly and involves a power imbalance (Patchin & Hinduja, 2011). Bullying relates to the overall theme of stigma as the child experiences bullying due to the stigma of parental incarceration. First, in several stories included in the sample, verbal taunts were amongst the most common forms of bullying observed. In one of the books, children were seen as taunting a child who had an incarcerated parent. For instance, in *When Dad Was Away*, the other children stated, “Pri-son! Pri-son!” as Milly ran along the street, trying not to hear the children shouting behind her” (Weir, 2012). As shown in Figure 1, Milly is being taunted with the location of where her incarcerated parent is and thus is trying not to hear what the other children are saying (Kaba, 2018). Other examples illustrated how children might use a peer’s family situation as a taunt. In *The Night Dad Went to Jail ... What to Expect When Someone You Love Goes to Jail*, a peer taunts Sketch by yelling, “Bailey’s dad got picked up by the cops last night!” (Higgins, 2013).

Figure 1*Ears Closed*

In a study examining children's experiences on the impact of parental incarceration, Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) found that many of their participants experienced anxiety about the secret of having a parent incarcerated being revealed. Moreover, they reported that once the secret was out, how difficult it was to control as once one person had knowledge about the secret, how quickly it was shared around the school and the community. Thus, when Sketch's secret was revealed, Sketch experienced symptoms of anxiety as their "face got hot" and when he stated "[I wish] I could erase myself" (Higgins, 2013).

These examples also highlight how some stories attempt to educate about the types of bullying that children of incarcerated parents experience as well as how the child feels about it. Consistent with existing literature, some of the stories in the sample also illustrate how a child's friends may be the subject of bullying when they have knowledge of the parent being in prison

(Saunders, 2018). As shown in *Missing Daddy*, the act of a classmate disclosing the main character's parental incarceration to their peers created shame and stigma (Kaba, 2018). The children's books that do depict verbal taunts acknowledge that bullying and stigma are correlated. The books indicate that the outcome of bullying leaves the child anxious, embarrassed, sad, isolated, and hurt.

Another form of bullying that emerged in the sample was social exclusion. In several books, stories highlighted how the dynamics between children of incarcerated parents and their schoolmates changed. In *Far Apart, Close in Heart*, for instance, Birtha (2017) writes, "I guess some kids forget that words can really hurt your feelings" while Kaba (2018) remarks "sometimes friends act differently...the boys on Jermaine's team call him names" in *Missing Daddy*. As stated previously, the concept of a courtesy stigma can also be highlighted in the subtheme bullying as schoolmates are bullying the child based on the bond that the child has with their incarcerated parent (Goffman 1986).

In Figure 2, which was taken from *Far Apart, Close in Heart*, Birtha (2017) shows how social exclusion is a form of bullying. Specifically, the child has his arms crossed with an angry expression on his face. Four children are staring at him while he stands alone, illustrating the boy's exclusion from peer groups. In another book *Far Apart, Close in Heart*, Birtha demonstrates, "Emily's friend Tina won't play with her anymore. Tina says her mother told her to stay away from Emily," (2018). This type of social exclusion – parents or other community members limiting interaction with children of incarcerated parents - has been observed in a few studies (Coulthard, 2010; Hardy, 2018).

Figure 2*Four Against One*

In summary, the subtheme of *bullying* highlights the forms of bullying which include verbal abuse and social exclusion. As a tactic, the books highlight how children employed skills of de-identification as they lied about their parent's situation to cope with the perceived stigma of parental incarceration. Overall *bullying* is a subtheme of *stigma* as the bullying and the coping skills used are due to the child's circumstances of having a parent incarcerated.

Reducing Stigma

In the current sample, several books constructed efforts to reduce stigma amongst children of incarcerated parents. For the purposes of this study, reducing stigma refers to images, storylines, or dialogue showing friends, family, teachers, counsellors, or social workers providing support to children. The subtheme of reducing stigma will also highlight reassurance as the narratives in the sample demonstrated reassurance as an approach to reduce stigma. Reassurance refers to characters in storylines who make efforts to remove fears or doubts in the

child's mind and to ease negative emotions. Briefly, the sampled stories showed several ways to reduce stigma including the use of different types of people that provided support for the child of parental incarceration, the content in which the child experienced reassurance, and lastly, the illustrations of how incarceration was framed when explaining it to a child. Thus, the subtheme of *reducing stigma* is important in the overall theme of stigma as the stories illustrate how children cope with stigma and how they reduce stigma.

In some of the sampled books, stories emphasized that the child was not alone and that other adults were present for the child to confide in. Other stories highlighted the role of authority figures and friends directly standing up for the child and breaking down stigma. First, the role of friendship is significant when reducing stigma. For example, in *Kofi's Mom*, "The teacher asked whose parents were coming to the school carnival. Josh said his dad couldn't come because he was in prison. At playtime, Kofi told Josh all about his mom. They told each other stories about visiting prison" and then shares, "Kofi now talks about his mom. He's glad he is not the only person with a mom or dad in prison" (Dyches, 2010b). Kofi found that having a friend like Josh made it easier for him to talk about his mother. Another example of having friends as a support system is illustrated in *My Dad's in Prison* when a child never knew that one of his team members also had an incarcerated parent,

There's a boy there from football called Luke! He says he's going to see his dad, but he's hoping that this will be the last visit before his dad comes home. I never knew his dad was in prison, but Luke says he can't really remember his dad ever being at home before. I hope my dad isn't going to be away for that long. (Walter, 2018, p. 25)

Similarly, in *Our Moms*, Futrell revealed, "It is good to know we are not the only kids who have moms in prison," agreed Jennifer, Michael, Paul and Anne" (2015). Here, Futrell (2015) noted four children, Jennifer, Michael, Paul and Anne all agreeing that they felt comfort in knowing

that they have each other to talk to about their parental incarceration, indicating that they are not alone. As such, these stories provide readers that children who experience parental incarceration can offer understanding, comfort, acceptance, and affirmations to the other children in a social setting.

Figure 3 also illustrates how other schoolmates can help reduce stigma (Higgins, 2013). For instance, the top image shows the bunny, Sketch walking away while the mouse, Kenny has his arms crossed and is making remarks at Sketch. The bottom image shows another animal offering support so that Sketch is not alone.

Figure 3

Supporting Friend



Each of these examples show how peer support may be important to children experiencing parental incarceration. As shown in Figure 3, although the animal in the green shirt does not have

a parent incarcerated, they were still supportive to their classmate by offering a hand. This image illustrates the idea of not being alone and how being inclusive can aid in reducing the stigma experienced by children of parental incarceration.

In addition to peer support, several stories presented other adults as significant role-players in helping children in *reducing stigma*. For example, in some stories, teachers were shown as adults who could stand up for those children with incarcerated parents and further support the child. In *When Dad was Away* for instance, a teacher stated

Remember at the beginning of term we were talking about looking after each other? She said. I don't want anyone in this class to forget that it isn't fair to tease people or call them names. Come and tell me if you hear somebody doing that – and if you are feeling upset you know you can always talk to me. (Weir, 2012, p. 8)

Existing research offers some support for the role of adults, including teachers, in helping children manage stigma.

Besides teachers, stories featured several other adult figures supporting children, including friends, school counsellors, and guardian figures such as grandparents. For example, in *The Night Dad Went to Jail ... What to Expect When Someone You Love Goes to Jail*, Miss Sanchez, the school counsellor, is involved in her student's life and teaches them different coping mechanisms.

Miss Sanchez said feeling angry, sad, and scared was OK. So was feeling worried and embarrassed. She gave me ideas for what to do with my "scribble" feelings. Next time, I can walk away instead of fighting. I can draw pictures or talk to someone I trust. (Higgins, 2013, p. 15)

In the above quote, Miss Sanchez aided in validating the child's feelings but also gave them alternative healthy coping strategies. As consistent with literature, school counsellors play an important role in offering support and advocating for students as they understand the impact of parental incarceration and how to cope with it (Warren et al., 2019). More importantly, Miss

Sanchez provided the child with another platform for them to open up with similar children as studies have shown the importance of being around others who can relate to the same situation (Warren et al., 2019; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

Figure 4 shows the child feeling better and smiling after a one-on-one visit with the school counsellor (Bender 2003).

Figure 4

A Session with the School Counsellor



Another example of a school counsellor being supportive is shown in *Missing Daddy*, “At school, I talk to the counsellor, Ms. Parker. I guess it helps me feel a little bit better. She asks me a lot of questions about my daddy in prison” (Kaba, 2018). This example signifies the importance of asking questions regarding the incarceration as it allows children to open up to someone whom they trust. As such, the children’s books reveal that school counsellors are a

support network as they are able to aid children engage in healthy coping mechanisms as well as getting children to open up about the parental incarceration.

Next, reassurance is also seen as a form of reducing stigma for children of parental incarceration. Briefly, in the study's sample, reassurance refers to other characters in storylines who make efforts to remove fears or doubts in the child's mind and to ease negative emotions. In three of the samples, reassuring children of parental incarceration through the use of words is encouraged. For instance, in *My Dad's in Prison*, the main child's mother stated, "You are still the same boy you were before with the same friends. Next week, they'll all be talking about something else," demonstrates the child's mother is trying to reassure the child that by next week, all will be forgotten (Walter, 2018). In another example, *Knock Knock, My Dad's Dream For Me*, a child was reassured by a letter from their incarcerated parent that states,

KNOCK KNOCK for me, for as long as you become your best, the best of me still lives in you. KNOCK KNOCK with the knowledge that you are my son and you have a bright, beautiful future. For despite my absence, you are still here. (Beaty, 2013, p. 32-34)

The narratives in both these excerpts highlights how letting the child know that they have a beautiful future and that their parents are proud of them show that these relationships and words are significant so that children can develop good coping skills as well as resiliency which further aids in reducing stigma (Brown & Gibbons, 2018).

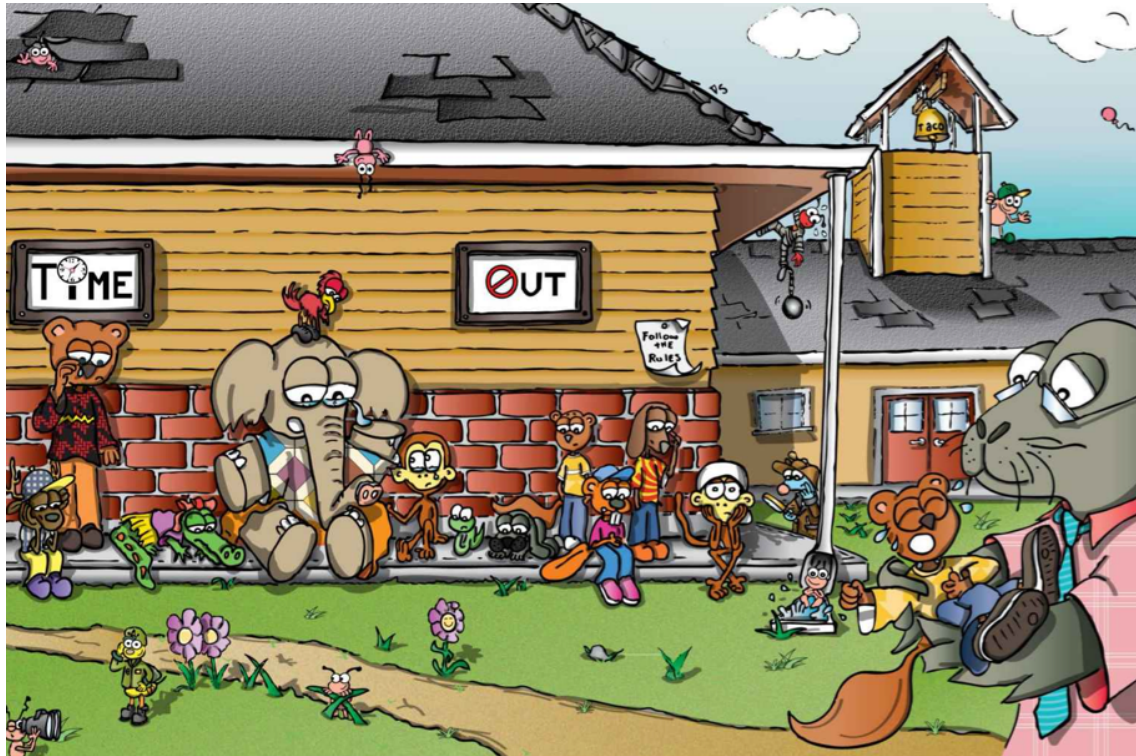
Moreover, several books included in the sample offered illustrations on how children of incarcerated parents might deal with stigma. First, a child with an incarcerated parent may pretend that their parent is not incarcerated. For instance, in *When Dad Was Away*, Milly stated, "I told them he was away working, but everyone laughed at me," which shows that Milly tried to tell her classmates that her father was working, when in fact he was incarcerated (Weir, 2017).

Another example, *Hazelnut Days*, reveals the child stating that their father does multiple things: “He’s a cloud sculptor, a mole tamer, an inventor of dirty words. They laugh at that, and the sound of their laughter rises through the tall branches” (Bourdier, 2018). Both the excerpts above show that the children are using a strategy called de-identification in which they lie about their parent’s situation as they both understood the shame and stigma that they perceived to be attached to the parental incarceration (Cochran et al., 2018; Thulstrup & Karlsson, 2017). As such, the children’s books that depict de-identification highlight that children may not have effective strategies of combatting bullying and thus further education is needed for children of parental incarceration and their support networks on how to handle bullying.

Lastly, stories in the sample suggested that parents could help in *reducing stigma* by explaining incarceration to children. One of the strategies that emerged in stories was ‘reframing’ the meaning of incarceration for children to facilitate understanding. Several books suggested that children may not understand the law and punishment and thus, stories often compared breaking the law to breaking the rules or having a time out. For instance, in *Almost Like Visiting*, incarceration was framed as, “He got in trouble and now he is in prison...almost like timeout except when it happens to grownups they have to go to prison,” which further highlights how prison is like a time-out in the sense that having a time-out is a punishment for children (Ellis, 2016). Figure 5 also illustrates animals having a time-out (Curcio, 2015). By using the word time-out, children are able to understand the situation as well as relate to it more.

Figure 5

Animals in a Time-out



In summary, the subtheme of *reducing stigma* highlights the integral role that establishing supportive networks, having reassurance, and reframing the idea of incarceration is important in reducing stigma. That is, *reducing stigma* is a subtheme of *stigma* as it focuses on the supports that children have, the actions and words used to provide reassurance and comfort as well as reframing the idea of parental incarceration all alleviate the stigma that children experience. It highlights the importance of how children have adopted coping strategies through opening up and surrounding themselves with a wide support network.

Overall, the major theme of *stigma* included courtesy stigma which focused on the stigma that children experienced due to the parent-child bond that they had with their incarcerated parent. In *courtesy stigma*, it was also shown how keeping the parental incarceration a secret was one of the ways to mitigate the perceived stigma and shame that came with having an

incarcerated parent. Second, *bullying* was highlighted as a subtheme in stigma as children often experienced bullying due to their courtesy membership. Thus, they engaged in de-identification to reduce the bullying. Third, *reducing stigma* highlighted the importance of support networks such as friends, family, school counsellors, and teachers to aid in reducing the stigma experienced by children of parental incarceration. Reassurance was also highlighted as a means for children to find comfort and open up about their situation more so. Thus, *courtesy stigma*, *bullying*, and *reducing stigma* aided in constructing the theme of *stigma*.

Experiences with the Prison Themes

Based on analyses of the sample, the second major theme that emerged in the children's books was a focus on children's experiences with the prison. Not surprisingly, many of the books sought to address child concerns and fears about prison and incarceration. Specifically, *experiences with the prison* theme explored subthemes of *child concerns for the incarcerated parent*, *child feelings towards the prison*, *the prison setting itself*, *the night before a visit*, *prison distance*, *positive and negative visits*, and questions about *the prisoners*. In the following section, I will discuss how these themes relate to stigma, how it hurts or strengthens the parental bond, and how they suggest prison visits could be improved for children.

Worried About the Parent

One major sub-theme that emerged in the discussion about prison in the sample was the need to address child fears and concerns. That is, stories in several books explored the various ways in which children worry about their incarcerated parent and their concerns for their parent's well-being inside prison. By introducing these concerns, the intended purpose of these children's books is to assure children that the fears and concerns that they have are normal.

First, among common worries addressed, children often fear for their incarcerated parent's safety after visiting them in prison. According to existing literature, children often worried about their parents and were uncertain about when and whether or not if their parent was going to be released (Knudsen, 2016). Several stories in the sample illustrated and normalized these concerns. For example, in *Anna's Test*, Anna expressed concerns about not knowing what would happen to her dad or what his life was like in the prison:

... she wished he didn't have to go back behind that door. She didn't know what happened back there. He seemed okay, but it still always made her worry. She wanted her dad to come home with her. (Hollins & Kitty, 2019, p. 34)

Similarly, two other books also normalized the fear and worry that children experience. In *My Daddy is in Jail*, the main character stated, "Sometimes I worry about my dad. Is he safe? Is he sad too?" (Bender, 2003). Likewise, in *Sing, Sing, Midnight!*, the main character wondered if their dad was lonely, "Do you ever get lonely, Daddy?" (Gallagher, 2016). Each of these three examples illustrate that a goal of children's books about parental incarceration is to offer reassurances that many experienced fears and questions are normal.

Another way in which some books in the sample addressed child fears and concerns was through narratives that touched on a child character's questions in regard to the parent's safety and loneliness. For example, in *Sing, Sing, Midnight!*, the book demonstrated an incarcerated parent telling their child what prison is like,

"Daddy, who takes care of you in here?"
 "Well, the officers keep me safe." I already knew that. "But who keeps you company?"
 "I have friends. We play cards, tell jokes, and make music together."
 "Okay, okay, but who tucks you in and tickles your feet and kisses you goodnight?"
 "Oh, well there isn't really anyone who does all that. But, when I get really lonely, there's always Midnight."
 "Who's Midnight?"
 "The cat who lives here." (Gallagher, 2016, p. 11-12)

In summary, the subtheme of *worried about the incarcerated parent* highlights the fears and concerns that children may have whilst their parent is in custody. Concerns about safety, if they are lonely, or if they were sad were shown and revealed that children experience the same thing and that what they are feeling is normal and common. As such, in *Sing, Sing, Midnight!*, the book aided in addressing these concerns by having a conversation that answered the child's concerns around safety and prison lifestyle. Overall, this section highlights the worriedness that children have for their parent and the idea that what they are experiencing is normal.

Feelings Towards the Prison

A second subtheme that emerged in the sample was efforts to address child questions about, and feelings towards, prison itself. Specifically, several stories examined the different types of emotions that children experience when they are either visiting their parents in prison or when they are thinking about prison. This was done as a means to address the children's anxiety about prison as they lack the information of what prison is, what happens in prison, and if it is safe. As such, I will first discuss the range of emotions that children feel towards the prison to address the children's concerns. For instance, these emotions are demonstrated through the words, the actions, and the illustrations of the prison. Second, I will discuss the descriptions used when explaining the external and internal setting of the prison which aids in encouraging children to visit their incarcerated parents and connect with them despite the setting. For instance, this could include descriptions of the outside, prison rules, room layout, prison staff, and visiting conditions.

Across the sample, the most common emotion that child characters expressed towards prison was fear. For example, in *Doogie's Dad*, before the visit, Doogie said, "I was a bit scared about going, but I wanted to see him very much," which demonstrates that although the child

was scared, the thought of seeing their father outweighed that fear (Dyches, 2010a). Likewise, in *The Night Dad Went to Jail ... What to Expect When Someone You Love Goes to Jail*, Sketch stated, “The prison was really scary, but we could visit Dad without a wall between us” (Higgins, 2013). Similarly, in *When Dad Was Away*, during a visit to the prison, Milly stated that “It was scary and she held tight to Mum’s hand,” while in *Anna’s Test*, Anna stated that “She walked quickly with her mother to the desk” (Hollins & Kitty, 2019; Weir, 2012). Each of these examples illustrate similar fears of visiting the prison, providing a resource to children that highlights how common these fears are.

Another emotion that the books highlighted was sadness and curiosity. A common illustration of sadness is illustrated in *What Do I Say About That? ... Coping with an Incarcerated Parent*, when the main child character stated “I hate to come to the slammer! It makes me feel so sad!” (Cook, 2015). Next, curiosity was also frequently explored as children have many questions about the prison itself. For instance, in *My Daddy is in Jail*, the main child stated “I don’t understand much about jail. I wonder about a lot of things. What is jail like? Is it dirty? Is it a scary place?” (Bender, 2003). Here, this child has never been to prison and is thus asking a lot of questions to better understand what prison is like. These story points are intended to show that children do not know what prison is like and thus there needs to be a conversation about it to help them understand. As such, in *My Dad’s in Prison*, prior to visiting the prison, the child asked their mother what prison was like, in which she explained,

Dad has food at a canteen like we have in school, he can read books, and he has a room that he shares with another man called John. He has exercise time when he can go outside and he can watch TV too. He just can’t come out to see us when he likes. (Walter, 2018, p. 10-11)

Specifically, this excerpt highlights the importance of helping children to understand the prison setting and routine. However, none of the books revealed a conversation of what the prison yard

or what the prison looked like before the visitation. As stated in the literature, lack of information in regard to incarceration is a major concern amongst children (Rosenberg, 2009). Thus, having conversations about what incarceration is may aid in removing this concern as well as removing stigma and a sense of uncertainty that children may have due to lack of knowledge.

Another way in which some of the stories in the sample addressed these fears was to offer examples of children being undeterred in their prison visits. Specifically, some of the storylines made efforts to demonstrate examples of children coping with parental incarceration in various ways such as positive experiences when spending time with their parent. For example, in *When Dad Was Away*, Milly spent Christmas in prison, “It felt strange, going to a Christmas party in the prison. But it was a real party with juice and sausages and crisps, and Santa was there too!” (Weir, 2012). In addition, in *Anna’s Test*, Anna expressed that she was happy but also uncomfortable, “She saw the ugly gray building looking back at her. It made her happy and uncomfortable at the same time” (Hollins & Kitty, 2019). Each of these examples highlights that celebrations can also take place in prison which aids in providing some normalcy. As such, this aids in reducing the stigma around incarceration as the prison does accommodate celebrations, and the child and family can still engage in traditions.

Next, I will examine how some stories took time to describe the physical prison setting and the visitation process itself for children. For instance, in *Kofi’s Mom*, Kofi stated “It looked like a big castle,” and in *My Dad’s in Prison*, the child stated, “We have to drive down a lane with big fences...there are lots of cameras,” and in *When Dad Was Away*, “Milly looked up at the huge doors and high walls” (Dyches, 2010b; Walter, 2018; Weir, 2012). Likewise, Figure 6 illustrates the prison as a tall grey building with metal bars on the windows as opposed to the colourful school and house (Dyches, 2010b).

Figure 6*Prison Building*

In two books, the dress code that families and children must adhere to was mentioned. For example, in *Kennedy's Big Visit*, Kennedy had to change multiple times as she wanted to keep dressing up as a princess (Brooks, 2015). Her mother finally stated, “I will let you pick out your own clothes. If you put something on that is not appropriate, mommy will have to choose” (Brooks, 2015). In the second book, *Our Moms*, Michael mentioned, “I have to wear certain clothes, or they will not let me visit” (Futrell, 2016). Additionally, in *Kennedy's Big Visit*, her visitation experience highlights what documentation is needed for the visit and the order in which things will be done. For instance,

“Inmate number,” says the correctional officer.

“EXY417” Daphne says. Daphne gives the correctional officer her photo ID and Kennedy’s birth certificate.

“Mommy let’s get the locker” Kennedy says.

“Slow down Kennedy, we have to sign in first.” (Brooks, 2015, p.16)

Other stories showed the security checks as part of the visitation process. A lot of the children in the stories explained what it was like going through the metal detectors and getting searched by the correctional officers as part of visiting their incarcerated parents. In *Doogie's Dad*, Doogie laughed during the search and stated, "When we got to the prison, a lady searched Mom, Rosie, and me. She smoothed her hands over our clothes which felt all tickly and made me giggle" (Dyches, 2010a). In *My Dad's in Prison*, Figure 7, the child explains it as if it was a game stating, "we have to walk through an arch and hold up our arms like aeroplanes while the officers wave a wand around us. Lastly, we go past some dogs and into a waiting room" (Walter, 2018).

Figure 7

Security Checks



Another aspect of this subtheme was interactions and illustrations intended to show children and their caregivers what to expect from interactions with prison staff. In a few stories, child characters mentioned the correctional officers and their attitudes during the visitation

experience and how they felt. For instance, in *Hazelnut Days*, the main child did not like the guard and stated, “I don’t like this guard. He’s mean, and he certainly doesn’t know how to use his ears properly” (Bourdier, 2018). Secondly, in *Sing, Sing, Midnight!*, Maya changed her mind about the correctional officers stating, “I used to be afraid of the officers but Mommy told me they are there to keep us safe” (Gallagher, 2016). Lastly, in *Anna’s Test*, Anna reflected on how a nice versus a mean officer made her feel, “She was happy a nice guard was working today. Sometimes the people who worked in the jail weren’t so nice and that made Anna not want to come back” (Hollins & Kitty, 2019). Figure 8 illustrates Anna giving a prison officer a high-five after passing the metal detectors (Hollins & Kitty, 2019).

Figure 8

High-Five



Overall, the subtheme of *feelings towards the prison* focuses on stories that encourage children to visit the prison and addresses the fact that children going through parental incarceration have similar emotions and that it is normal. For instance, the narratives highlighted children as being scared, sad, angry, uncomfortable, happy, and curious. Representing these emotions conveyed the message that it is okay to experience them and that children are resilient. In addition, the stories also highlight the importance of having a conversation with the child as to what prison is like in order for children to have a better understanding of prison before visiting. As such this subtheme illustrates how the books try to make the prison visit feel safe for children to connect with their incarcerated parents despite the prison environment.

The Night Before the Visit

In this section, the third subtheme of *the night before the visit* will be reviewed. The sample's construction of experiences with the prisons was the night before the visit, or a child's feelings and habits before visiting their incarcerated parent inside prison. According to the literature, children often have a hard time falling asleep due to parental incarceration and thus have sleeping disorders; however, there is limited literature on what children are like the night before visiting their parents (Springer et al., 2000; Tasca, 2015). Thus, this section examines how storylines highlighted the fears, excitement, and habits that children may have before they visit their incarcerated parent in the morning.

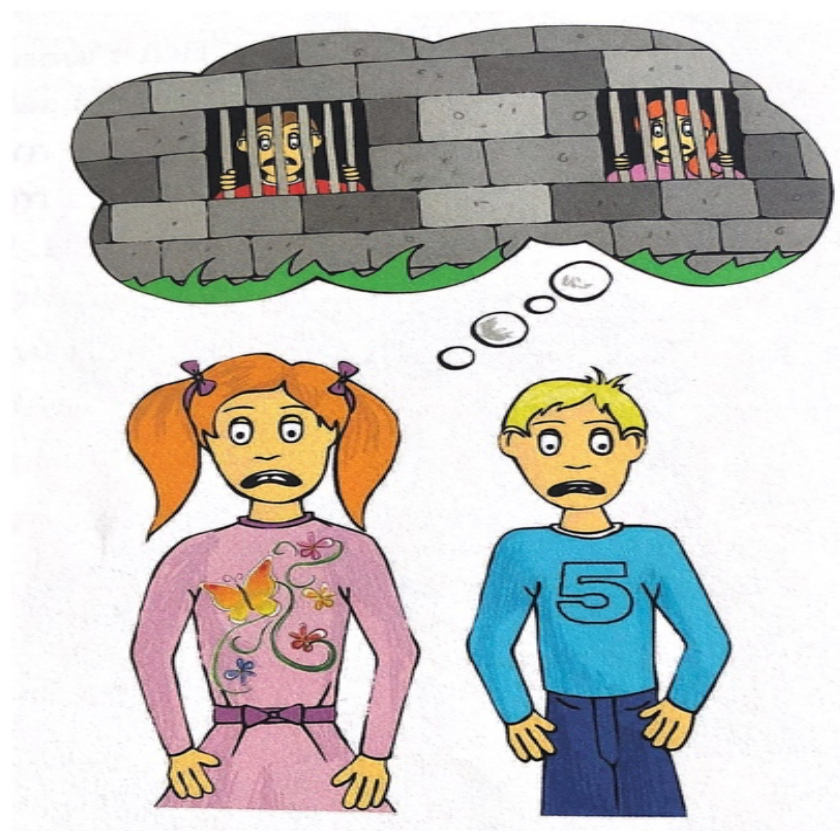
In some stories, the authors addressed the possibility that children's fears or anxieties may appear in their nightmares or that they might be too excited to sleep. First, in two of the stories, the children have nightmares the night before they visit the prison. For example, in *Doogie's Dad*, Doogie explains that he has nightmares before a visit, stating,

That night I had a bad dream. I dreamed Mom went to live in prison too. I dreamed that Rosie and I were left all alone. I dreamed that Mom and Dad were angry with me, that it was all my fault that they were in prison. (Dyches, 2010a, p. 8)

Additionally, Figure 9 illustrates the nightmare that Doogie had (Dyches, 2010a). In the nightmare, Doogie's sister was beside him, indicating that she too had the same dream or that she might have expressed to Doogie the same feelings. I believe the intended purpose of the children's books of creating this nightmare is to show how children often blame themselves for their parent's incarceration. It highlights guilt, blame, and fear.

Figure 9

Both Parents in Prison Nightmare

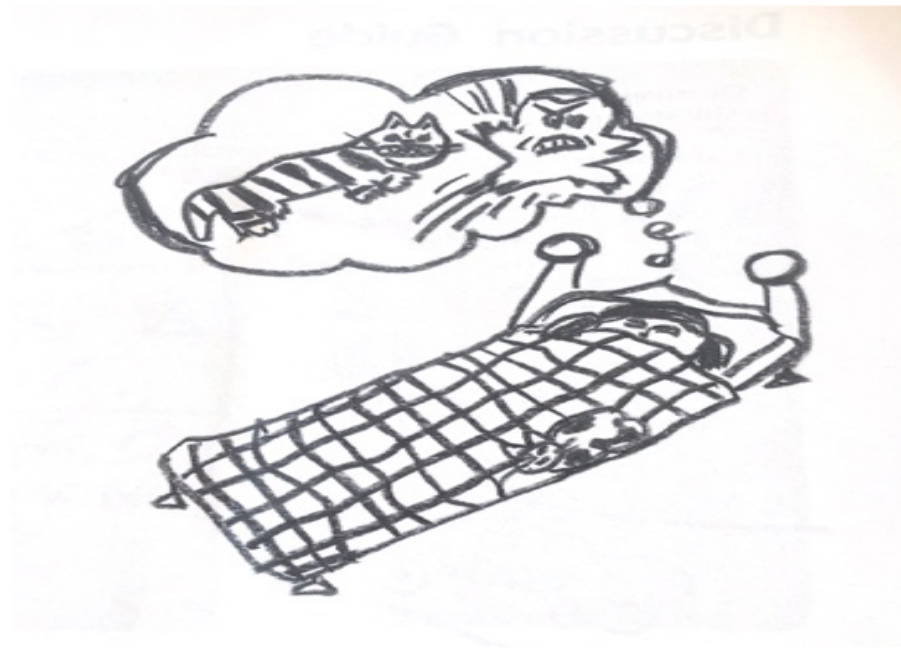


On the other hand, in *My Daddy's in Jail*, the main child character had a dream about two figures attacking each other (Curcio, 2015). In Figure 10, the striped animal is illustrated as the child's cat, but bigger and tougher as shown through the cat's scowl. The angry-looking figure that the

cat is attacking is meant to be the child's fear and thus the child symbolizes the cat as a sign of bravery and something that is stronger than how she is feeling. These feelings of bravery, blaming oneself, and being scared as shown through the text and illustrations are meant to show children that these feelings are common.

Figure 10

Night Terrors



Most of the stories, however, depicted children as too excited to go to sleep before visiting their incarcerated parents. For example, in *Missing Daddy*, the main child stated, “When visiting day is near, I can hardly sleep. I’m so excited, the happiness in my soul is deep” (Kaba, 2018). Likewise, in *Sing, Sing, Midnight!*, Maya stated “I’m very excited about our trip-WAY too excited to sleep! I’d rather wiggle” (Gallagher, 2016). In Figure 11, *Missing Daddy* illustrates that the child is unable to sleep as shown by the smile on her face, the moon shining and the digital clock showing that it is 11:11 pm (Kaba, 2018). In the illustration is also a light bug, which is the child’s nickname that was given to her by her incarcerated father. The light bug

flying by the photograph of her holding her father's hand could also symbolize her bond with her father and how excited she is to go see him tomorrow.

Figure 11

Too excited



In summary, the subtheme of *the night before the visits* highlights an attempt by these stories to highlight common fears children may hold including nightmares, an inability to sleep, excitement, and guilt. The negative emotions that turn into nightmares may be an indicator of how ashamed, scared, and lonely the child might be before the visits. Next, the excitement of seeing their incarcerated parent tomorrow left children unable to sleep for the night or kept them up later in the night. Thus, this subtheme of *the night before the visit* is important in the overall

theme of *experiences with prisons* as it provides readers with positive and negative narratives when trying to sleep before the night of a visitation.

Prison Distance

Another aspect of parental incarceration and its impact on the parental bond explored in the sample's stories was physical distance. Among several stories, the distance to visit a parent and its impact on children was presented. Briefly, *prison distance* refers to the distance it takes to get from the family home to the prison for a visit. In the sample, 16 of the children's books illustrated children visiting their parents, however, only 12 of these books talked about prison distance.

First, in several of the stories, the frequency of the visits ranged from weekly to monthly or the books did not disclose the frequency of visits. For instance, in *When Dad Was Away*, Milly is seen visiting her father twice before his release (Weir, 2012). Whereas in *My Daddy is in Jail*, one of the children stated, "one Sunday a month, Mommy takes me to visit my dad" (Bender, 2003). In *Visiting Day*, the child stated, "One day, we'll be able to wake up and have Daddy right there in our house again, and we won't have to take long bus rides once a month and walk home from the bus stop hand in hand" (Woodson, 2002). Likewise, in *Sing, Sing, Midnight!*, Maya also visited her father once a month as stated, "On Saturdays, we go on a train trip to visit my Daddy" (Gallagher, 2016).

Second, *prison distance* was measured by the type of transportation that families used and how it might impact the ability of children to visit their incarcerated parents. In *The Night Dad Went to Jail ... What to Expect When Someone You Love Goes to Jail*, the main child character stated, "for a while, Dad was in jail nearby... We took the bus" but "after four months, Dad was sent to a prison further away. Our bus ride took all morning" (Higgins, 2013). In *Sing*,

Sing, Midnight!, Maya stated, “We have to get on the train very early before the sun even wakes up!” (Gallagher, 2016). Similarly in *Our Moms*, Michael stated “When Grandma and I visit we have to get up very early... Because it is so far, it takes forever to get there” (Futrell, 2015). Each of these examples illustrate the costs associated with travel for prison visits and the burden this may place on many families (Knudsen, 2016).

In summary, the geographical location of the prison and its impact on maintaining a parental bond was highlighted in several ways including the frequency of the visits and barriers to getting to the prison. Thus, narratives in the stories generally suggested that the location of the prison is attainable and that travelling to the prison is worth it in order to maintain contact with the incarcerated parents.

Negative and Positive Prison Visits

A number of the sampled stories provided examples of negative and positive visits and how children responded to and dealt with emotions that emerged following their time with an incarcerated parent. For the purposes of this study, a *negative incarceration visit* refers to prison visitations in which the child is uncomfortable, upset, nervous, and/or anxious, whereas *positive incarceration visit* included instance where the child was comfortable, happy, and excited. Only three books included negative prison visitation experiences.

One way in which negative prison visits were presented coincided with storylines where the children expressed concerns for their incarcerated parent after the visit. For instance, in Bourdier’s (2018) story, *Hazelnut Days*, the main child expressed concerns with his father’s smoking habits, which triggered an angry response.

“I warned him he could get cancer, and I crushed his pack of cigarettes. He got really mad – a deep, quiet anger without any yelling. But his eyes turned red, and his hands squeezed into white fists. This time I don’t crush anything” (Bourdier, 2018).

During the main child’s second visit, he sat quietly while his father smoked.

Additionally, in the same book, *Hazelnut Days*, the main child was scared of giving their father their report card as they had not done so well. “My grades in math are bad enough, but when he seen my marks in language, he hits the roof. He grabs my arm so tightly it hurts. He tells me I have no right to do so poorly in school-it’s my only chance to avoid becoming like him” (Bourdier, 2018).

Another story in the sample dealt with the situation wherein a child expresses their frustration with the parent’ incarceration directly in a visit. Specifically, in *What Do I Say About That? ... Coping with an Incarcerated Parent*, the main child complained that, “It’s not fair, I scream, that you’re in here and I don’t have a dad!” I hate to come to the slammer! It makes me feel so sad” which shows that the child does not like having their dad in prison (Cook, 2015). Likewise, in *The Night Dad Went to Jail ... What to Expect When Someone You Love Goes to Jail*, Sketch was unable to communicate with his incarcerated father (Higgins, 2013). For instance, Sketch revealed, “dad sat on the other side of a glass wall. We each talked to him on a telephone. When it was my turn, I couldn’t look at him” (Higgins, 2013).

To conclude, this subtheme of *negative visits* highlights how negative visits can deter children from visiting or forgiving their incarcerated parent again. Thus, the subtheme of *negative visits* aid children in understanding that it is not always positive and that some visits can be bad as well. The stories demonstrate how negative visits can hurt the child and how they attend future visits. Thus, this also highlights the strain on the bond that the child has with the

incarcerated parent. In contrast, more stories in the samples presented positive examples of prison visits. Several stories included examples of positive visits where children were excited to finally see their incarcerated parents and, most importantly, tell them about their life. In other words, these stories emphasized that prison visits could allow for the types of interactions with parents that would occur in the family home.

Stories showed a variety of positive experiences during visits including children doing simple things like talking with their incarcerated parents about new hobbies, what they ate, what they read, and how school was going. For example, in *Almost Like Visiting*, Jeremiah stated, “We sat and talked. I told him about school and showed him my list of spelling words,” and his sister Jordan stated, “I showed him how I can hula hoop!” (Ellis, 2016). These siblings talked about their life and the new things that they have learned. Similarly, in *Visiting Day*, the main child character stated, “Only on visiting day do I get to tell Daddy everything that has happened over the month” (Woodson, 2002). Likewise, in *Anna’s Test*, Anna stated, “I forgot to tell you about my spelling test. Remember how you used to help me study? Well, I have been studying all by myself and this week I got 100% on my test!” (Hollins & Kitty, 2019). As shown in Figure 12, positive prison visits could even include opportunities to share new interests or hobbies with an incarcerated parent.

Figure 12

Paper Planes



Furthermore, several books in the sample showed and normalized the excitement children experienced when visiting their incarcerated parents. In *Our Moms*, Paul talked about their love for video games, stating, “I love telling my mom about all the new levels I am on with my games...It is like she is keeping score for me because she reminds me of what I told her our last visit,” which signifies how important the child’s hobby is (Futrell, 2015). Since the mother keeps track of Paul’s progress, it shows children that their incarcerated parent can still be involved in their lives.

In *Anna’s Test*, Anna confided in her father about situations at school stating,

She told him how Andrik and Junior got into an argument about who was the better basketball player. She told him how her art teacher was out sick for a whole week because he had the flu. She even told him that because she was in third grade now, she had to take state tests in order to go to the next grade. Her dad seemed to understand how stressful this could be. (Hollins & Kitty, 2019, p. 28)

Consistent with the previous example, this passage reinforces the importance of prison visits.

That is, these exchanges in stories told children that their incarcerated parent can still be involved in and play a role in their lives.

The first point of body contact was also described in several stories. 14 of the books showed children hugging or kissing their parents either at the beginning, during, and at the end of

the visit. For example, in *My Dad's in Prison*, a child stated, "Then I see Dad! He walks over as fast as he can and scoops me up, then gives Mum a kiss," which reveals the affection that the father gives to his child and mother (Walter, 2018). Likewise, in *The Night Dad Went to Jail ... What to Expect When Someone You Love Goes to Jail*, the main child character stated, "hugging him was one of the best feelings I'd had in a long time" and in another book, *Missing Daddy*, the child expressed, "I run and jump into his arms and he hugs me tight" (Higgins, 2013; Kaba 2013). Body contact at the beginning of the visit was also in *Sing, Sing, Midnight!*, when Maya revealed, "we hug and kiss Daddy" (Gallagher, 2016). Figure 13 illustrates a father and son running towards each other to engage in a hug at the start of the visit (Walter, 2018). Thus, these samples included examples of the first point of contact as it showed children that they could have a normal, healthy relationship with their incarcerated parent.

Figure 13

Running for Hugs



An interesting example of positive visits that came up in a few stories was the prison vending machine. Several stories made a point of showing children getting to use the vending machine during their visit. In *Our Moms*, for example, Michael expressed how he “love[s] going to visit [their] mom the most because of the candy [they] get from the vending machines” (Futrell, 2015), which is illustrated in Figure 14.

Figure 14

Vending Machine Snacks



The use of the vending machines illustrates the role that they play in the stories as children view the visits positively as they are allowed to have a snack, a feature of the prison that is similar to other settings.

In summary, the subtheme of *negative and positive parental incarceration visits* in children’s books shows that the storylines are also intended to encourage children that prison

visits, while scary, can also be opportunities to share the kinds of experiences that other children have with their parents. The subtheme of *negative visits* provides an opportunity for caregivers to prepare children before a visit and help them understand that not all visits will be positive and that they will still be like real-world interactions in the sense that the children might not like what their parents have to say. Whereas the subtheme of *positive visits* has a consistent message of children being able to have a healthy and normal relationship with their incarcerated parent.

The Prisoners

In the final subtheme of *the prisoners*, an analysis of what prisoners do while they are incarcerated will be explored. The stories addition of adding what prisoners do aids in letting children know that prisoners engage in daily activities that may be similar to what children do. For example, this could be singing, dancing, writing, and/or sitting. By showing what prisoners do, I believe based on the literature that this has the potential to normalize prisoners and allow children to see them as everyday people which may aid in removing the stigma of parental incarceration. As such, this subtheme symbolizes the routines of those incarcerated.

For instance, sleeping and dreaming about family, playing, exercising, playing music, singing, and thinking about their families are all examples of what prisoners do typically. In *Sing, Sing, Midnight!*, there was a cat, and this cat was named Midnight. Midnight kept the prisoners' company and thus, I believed this has the potential to symbolize a support system for the prisoners (Gallagher, 2016). For instance, Midnight would comfort the prisoners as "Joe was having a hard time falling asleep. It was his daughter's birthday and he missed her very much" (Gallagher, 2016). Since the cat cuddled with Joe, who was missing his daughter a lot, this shows how important it is to have a support system and how the prison setting can be isolating. Likewise, in *My Daddy's in Jail*, the narrator stated, "Bella and Lyle Bear's Daddy only thinks

about one thing. Going home to his special girls – just the thought makes him sing” (Curcio, 2015). This reveals to readers how important family means to the person incarcerated and how the thought of family keeps them pushing through the day. Thus, the idea of the prisoners missing their families and daydreaming about them whilst in custody was also prominent in the books. Showing the prisoners as missing their loved ones also demonstrates to children that the incarcerated parent does think about family daily and how important that bond is for them as most look forward to reuniting with their family upon release.

Additionally, other activities that showed what prisoners do was demonstrated in *Sing, Sing, Midnight!*: “Some men played games with string or balls, and ... exercise,” and, “they wrote letters to friends and kids,” and “played guitar and sang beautiful songs” (Gallagher, 2016). Again, the mention of writing letters to friends and family implies how important that support system is to the prisoners and that family and friends consume their thoughts daily. The other activities that the prisoners engage in can aid children in relating to them as children also play music, exercise, and play games. Thus, the stories' use of including the inmate's daily regime aid children in having knowledge about what life is like inside the prison as well as understand the importance of keeping in contact with their incarcerated parent.

In summary, the subtheme of *the prisoners* highlights the daily routine of what prisoners do whilst in custody. As such, these stories demonstrate to caregivers and children that the activities that the prisoners do are related to some of the same activities that children engage in. In addition, it allows children to understand that most incarcerated parents do think about their family and friends daily just like they do. Therefore, this theme is significant in the children's book as it provides children with knowledge.

To conclude, the overall theme of *experiences within the prison setting* included the subtheme of *children being worried about their incarcerated parents*. Based on the subthemes that emerged, the purpose of these books was to show children that they are not alone in what they are feeling. It highlights the importance of strong versus weak child-parent bonds and also provides children with knowledge of what prison is like in order to alleviate any negative emotions that they may feel in regards to parental incarceration.

The Parent Bond Themes

A third major theme that emerged from analyses of the sample was the parent bond. Briefly, parental bonding is defined as an attachment that occurs between the parent and the child whereas the relationship is the socialization between the child and the parent (Lian & Yeoh, 2011). Under the *Parental Bond* theme, several additional subthemes emerged including *still my parent and my role model*, *maintaining relationships*, *forgiving the parent*, *hope for the parent*, and *the release*. As such, these subthemes aid in explaining the overall theme of the *Parent Bond* as it looks at the relationship and attachment that occurs between the incarcerated parent and their child.

Still My Parent and My Role Model

A common thread across the sampled stories were narratives designed to encourage the maintenance of the parental bond. Some stories constructed narratives that highlighted that incarcerated parents were indeed still parents. Other studies even showed their child characters identifying their incarcerated parent as a role model. First, the subtheme, *still my parent and my role model*, refers to storylines that depict children of incarcerated parents accepting that their parent is incarcerated while still feeling a parental connection. Seven of the stories emphasized to

children that the incarcerated parent will always be the child's parent regardless of the current circumstances. Accordingly, in Boswell's (2002) study, one of the participants expressed "He's my Dad though, and I love him anyway and always will" when asked about how he felt about his father being in prison. This statement will aid in providing a definition for the theme of *still my parent and my role model* as demonstrated throughout the books.

In the stories, *still my parent and my role model* was depicted through the use of children acknowledging that their incarcerated parent is still the same person as before. For instance, in *Kofi's Mom*, Kofi stated, "She was just the same as she had always been" and thus acknowledging that his mother has not changed since being incarcerated (Dyches, 2010b). Likewise, in *Hazelnut Days*, the child stated, "deep beneath the peppermint he smells just like him," highlighting that the smell of his father is still constant and that being incarcerated did not change the way his father smelt. These two statements aid readers in understanding that the parent is still the same person as they smell the same and are the same as before incarceration.

Additionally, children acknowledge that being separated from the parent and the incarceration itself did not change the way they perceived their parents as still theirs. For instance, regardless of the distance, in *My Dad's in Prison*, the main child stated, "My dad might be away from me right now, but he's still my dad and he always will be" (Walter, 2018). This sample signifies that the child understands that his father cannot physically be present but regardless of his father's presence, the child acknowledges that his father is his father and will always be. Likewise, in *Our Mom's*, Jennifer, on behalf of three other children with incarcerated mothers, stated "but they still love us. They just do not live with us right now" (Futrell, 2015).

Third, children also acknowledge physical appearance when perceiving their parents as still the same. In *Anna's Test*, Anna noticed a change in her father's appearance, "her dad looked

the same except he was starting to grow a beard” (Hollins & Kitty, 2019). Thus, Anna recognizes that her father still looks the same as he was prior to incarceration but that he has a beard now.

Moreover, in *Hazelnut Days*, the story looked at biological similarities as a means to acknowledge that their father is still their parent (Bourdier, 2018). For example, the main child states,

I know my Dad and I belong together when I look at his ears. We’re the only ones in the world who can wiggle our ears up and down and wag them from side to side. And we can both touch our tips of our noses with our tongue. Well, a lot of people can do that. But the ear trick is something only we can do. (Bourdier, 2018, p. 10)

Second, some stories showed their child characters referring to their incarcerated parent as a role model. That is, these story points showed children feeling motivated, inspired, and encouraged to achieve their goals. For the purposes of this research, a role model is defined as an adult that children desire to be like and look up to (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2014). In the sample, three books highlighted children perceiving their *incarcerated parent as a role model*.

Children in the stories sometimes expressed wanting to be like their incarcerated parent based on the skills and qualities that the parent has. For example, in *Hazelnut Days*, the main child stated “and he can be so funny. He can imitate all kinds of people – especially Aunt Kiki. And he was on a TV show once. Say what you will, but one day I want to be like him” (Bourdier, 2018). In another story, *Knock Knock, My Dad’s Dream For Me*, the main child stated “Papa come home, ‘cause I want to be just like you, but I’m forgetting who you are” (Beaty, 2013).

On the other hand, in *What Do I Say About That? ... Coping with an Incarcerated Parent*, the main child character, who does not regularly see their parent stated, “I read my letter almost every day. I’m hoping his words will show me the way” (Cook, 2015). Here, the child is not forgetting who their father is as they read a letter written from his father almost daily. As such,

the child uses the letter as guidance, encouragement, and a way of seeing their incarcerated parent as “being there” as their role model. Thus, these narratives suggest that it is normal for children to still want to be like their parent despite them being incarcerated.

Maintaining a Relationship

One of the major subthemes that emerged under the theme of *Parent Bond* was *maintaining a relationship* with the incarcerated parent. Briefly, across several stories included in the sample, narratives illustrated various ways in which children could maintain contact with their incarcerated parent even if they were unable to visit them in prison. In part, these narratives sought to reinforce the importance of the parental bond for children of incarcerated parents. Moreover, within this subtheme, the stories offered encouragement to children that a parental bond could be maintained even when they could not always be with their parent.

To begin, several stories showed children using a variety of methods to maintain their relationship with their incarcerated parent as a positive influence on the parental bond. In *Doogie's Dad*, for instance, Doogie's mother explains to Doogie and his sister that there are a lot of different ways that they can stay in touch with their father whilst he is away, “Dad will be staying in prison for a while, but we can send him letters and you can talk to him when he calls” (Dyches, 2010a). Similarly, in *Almost Like Visiting*, Jeremiah explains, “some people are allowed to see their mom or dad who are in prison from home on a video call” (Ellis, 2016).

Other stories in the sample showed children writing letters to or receiving letters from their incarcerated parents. For example, in *Doogie's Dad*, Rosie stated, “We've got a letter! We've got a letter! Doogie and I got a letter! ... I wanted to open the letter, so Rosie let me tear open the envelope. Guess who it's from? DAD!” (Dyches, 2010a). Another way that children are able to maintain contact with their incarcerated parents is via phone calls. In *Far Apart, Close in*

Heart, BIRTHA (2017) writes, “Xavier’s dad calls him on the phone. After they talk, Xavier feels great. He doesn’t have to keep secrets from his dad,” Some children talk to their incarcerated parents before they go to bed. For example, as shown in Figure 15, in *My Dad’s in Prison*, the main child states “That night, I talked to Dad on the phone” (Walter, 2018).

Figure 15

Phone Call Between Father and Son



As part of these narratives, the stories took time to also illustrate how these contacts with incarcerated parents – despite being limited – could still allow for opportunities to build and maintain parental bonds. In *Knock Knock, My Dad’s Dream for Me*, the main child character wrote his father:

Papa, come home, ‘cause I miss you, miss you waking me in the mornings and telling me you love me. Papa come home, ‘cause there are things I don’t know, and when I get older I thought you could teach me how to dribble a ball, how to shave...how to drive, how to fix the car. (Beatty, 2013, p. 12-18)

Later in the book, the main child character receives a letter from his father answering these questions:

Dear Son, ask your mama to help make those scrambled eggs we love. Remember to do your homework before you watch TV. I am sorry I will not be coming home. For every lesson I will not be there to teach you, hear these words: As you grow older, shave in one

direction with strong, deliberate strokes to avoid irritation. Dribble the page with the brilliance of your ballpoint pen. No longer will I be there to knock on your door, so you must learn to knock for yourself. (Beaty, 2013, p. 26-32)

Thus, these stories aim to provide readers that children who maintain a relationship with their incarcerated parent is still attainable and can be a positive outcome for children.

Forgiving the Parent

The fourth subtheme to emerge from the theme *Parent Bond* was *forgiving the parent*. In two of the books, this was demonstrated via the conversations that the child had with their incarcerated parent and ultimately was up to the child to express forgiveness. As noted in the literature, forgiving the incarcerated parent may reduce feelings of hostility, anger, and resentment (Lander, 2012). This forgiveness in turn also restores a positive parent-child relationship (Lander, 2012). Thus, the subtheme of *forgiving the parent* is important when reinstating and maintaining a relationship between the child and parent.

First, forgiveness was commonly shown in stories through a simple, direct interaction in which the incarcerated parent asks their child for forgiveness. In *The Night Dad Went to Jail ... What to Expect When Someone You Love Goes to Jail*, Sketch's father admitted, "I messed up, Sketch," Dad said. "What I did caused a lot of problems, and I'm sorry. I hope you forgive me." "I wasn't sure what to say. I just nodded" (Higgins, 2013). Later on in the story, Sketch stated, "Dad's sentence is for six years. That's a long time to wait to go fishing again. I'm still angry. But I'm working on forgiving my dad, because I love him." In these narratives, the stories reinforce the idea for children that forgiveness may take time and work. That is, in this subtheme, the stories normalize some of the anger that children may be experiencing and the difficulty in accepting an apology.

Second, forgiveness emerged in the stories through the eyes of the incarcerated parent. Oftentimes, in these narratives, the stories showed the effects of not forgiving the parent are also demonstrated. In *What Do I Say About That? ... Coping with an Incarcerated Parent*, for instance, the story follows a child who is struggling with his father being in jail, and thus he is angry and shouts phrases such as “it’s not fair...that you’re in here and I don’t have a dad” or “Aren’t you angry at dad? ...He did bad things and chose to do drugs!” or “Why didn’t he love us enough to say NO?” (Cook, 2015). Later, during a visitation, the child notices a change, “today when I saw him, he looked into my eyes. I could see right away they were filled up with TRY” (Cook, 2015). Like the above examples, the message that seems to be conveyed through these particular narratives is the ‘work’ that is involved in forgiveness. As mentioned above, stories in the sample normalize the idea that children do not have to immediately forgive their incarcerated parent.

Hope for the Parent

Another aspect of parental incarceration and its impact on the *Parental Bond* explored in the sample’s stories was children having *hope for the incarcerated parent*. For this research, *hope for the parent* includes the child having hope for a better future, hope that the parent is doing better and is learning their lesson, and hope that they will be a family again. McKay et al., revealed that caregivers often expressed hope that the incarcerated parent would one day play a positive role in the child’s life (2018). Similarly, Poehlmann-Tynan and Pritzl (2019) noted that caregivers were hopeful that the incarcerated parent would change and would help their children make the right choices. Although limited in examples, this section will look at both the child’s and the caregiver’s hope in the incarcerated parent.

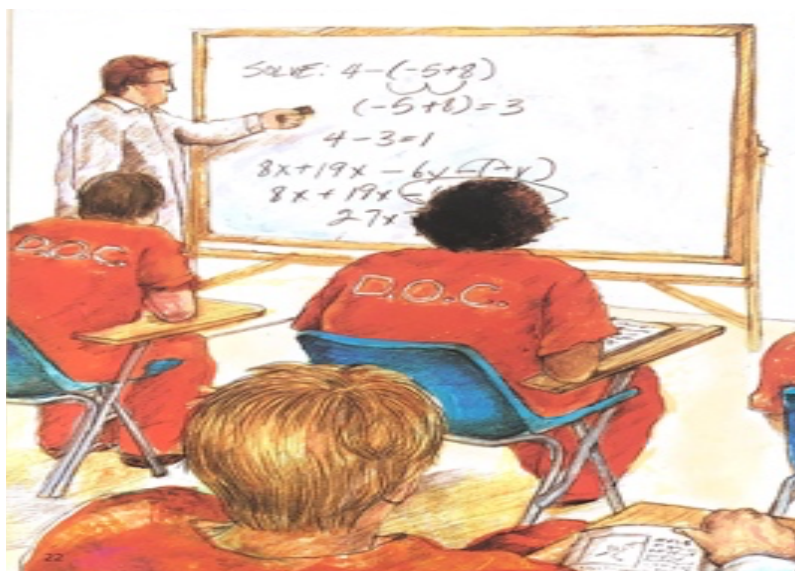
First, children have hope that their incarcerated parent is trying to change their ways. As such, in one of the books, *What Do I Say About That? ... Coping with an Incarcerated Parent*, the prison is explained as a place for the incarcerated parent to learn what is right and wrong, and thus, there is hope to make better decisions (Cook, 2015). For instance, the child states:

My mom says the slammer is helping my dad. He's starting to see why his choices were bad. It's teaching him how to play by the rules. They're even letting him go back to school. I hope he can turn his life around. And get out of the slammer and stand on free ground. (Cook, 2015, p. 22)

This highlights that the child has *hope for their incarcerated parent* as they believe that prison is helping their father lead a better life so that he can be free once released. This aligns with literature when children have hope that their parents can change for the better (Poehlmann-Tynan & Pritzl, 2019). Additionally, Figure 16 illustrates prisoners sitting at desks and paying attention to the teacher (Cook, 2015). This illustrates that education can take place in the prison setting. As such, this image shows children that their parent is learning to be better by enhancing their skills and thus provides the child hope.

Figure 16

Education within the Prison



Second, children have hope that their family will be together again. As noted in the literature, children noted that “a family without one member is incomplete” (Robertson, 2007). As such, three of the books highlighted wanting to be a whole family again. For instance, in *My Daddy is in Jail*, the main child character stated “I hope Daddy does come home someday. I hope things will be better. I want to feel happy. I want my family together again” (Bender, 2003). This sample shows children that it is normal to hope for a family reunion and that things can improve. Similarly, in *Kennedy’s Big Visit*, Kennedy is “teary eyed but she doesn’t cry because she knows Daddy will be home soon” (Brooks, 2015). Here, Kennedy is sad but has hope and knowledge that her dad will be back at home with her and her mother. Lastly, in *Visiting Day*, the child states, “One day, we’ll be able to wake up and have Daddy right there in our house again” which reveals the hope of being a full family one day (Woodson, 2002). As such, these samples highlight the hope that children have that their family will be whole again.

Lastly, caregivers also express hope for their incarcerated loved ones. As expressed in *Kennedy’s Big Visit*, Kennedy’s mother states,

I just hope you learned your lesson. All that expensive stuff you put your freedom on the line for is not worth you being away from us... I appreciate everything that you do but you have to start from the bottom. Kennedy is more concerned with your presence than the presents you bring home. You can take her to the dollar store and get her a bunch of junk for \$5.00. She is going to be happy... A parent’s presence is very important in a child’s life. I bring her up here to see you because I know how important that is to her. (Brooks, 2015, p.16-17)

In this excerpt, Kennedy’s mother has hope that her partner has learned his lesson and that a life of crime is not worth leaving the family for. This excerpt suggests that caregivers acknowledge the vital role that the incarcerated parent can have on establishing a positive relationship in the child’s life.

The Release

The final subtheme of *Parent Bond* that showcased working towards and maintaining a positive child-parent relationship was the subtheme of *the release*. Briefly, *the release* refers to the event of the incarcerated parent being released from prison and coming home. In the sample, the stories depict children and their other parent having feelings of anticipation, excitement, and being emotional for the return of their loved ones. *The release* is important in the overall them of *Parent Bond* as children are excited to have their incarcerated parent home again. This signifies how important a child-parent relationship is as having a parent who can physically be there is integral in the attachment that children have to their parents. As such, this section will explore the way in which the release is contextualized.

First, several stories illustrated how excited and emotional the children and families are for their incarcerated loved ones to be released. In *When Dad Was Away*, Milly “couldn’t wait to get home. Very slowly, she opened the front door – and there was Dad, with Sam on his knee. “Dad! Dad!” she yelled” (Weir, 2012). This sample shows how thrilled Milly was to have her father back home again. In another story, *Welcome Home: Mommy Gets Out Today*, Bernice noticed how emotional her family was:

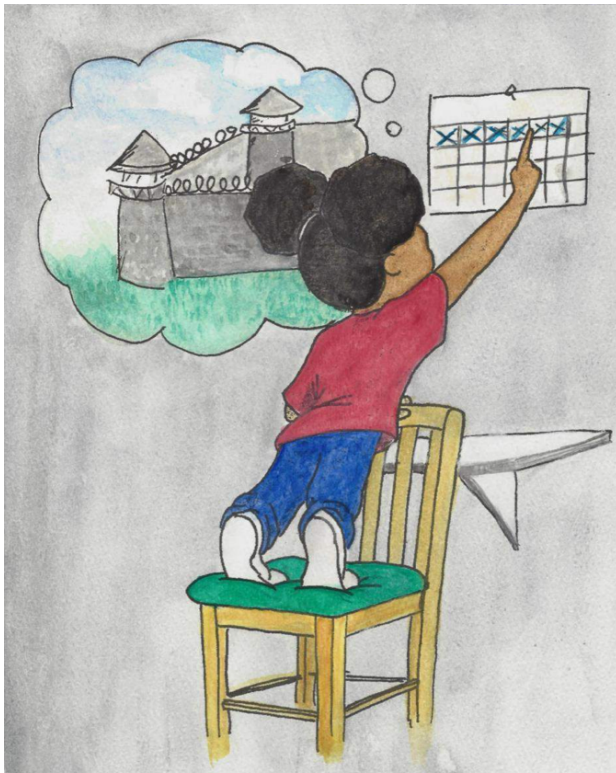
Looking around, I am surprised to see so many adults crying like little children. Even daddy is wiping his eyes. Everyone walks up to my mother sniffing and wiping tears from their cheeks. They also wrap their arms around her shoulders and hug her for a long time. (Watson, 2015, p. 10)

Second, anticipating the release was also highlighted in the books. This was shown through marking the calendars until the incarcerated parent is released and also during the day that the incarcerated parent is set to come home. First, Figure 17 illustrates the anticipation of waiting for their incarcerated parent to get release (Gallagher, 2016). The image highlights Maya

thinking about the prison and marking x's on the calendar to keep track of the days until her incarcerated parent returns home (Gallagher, 2016).

Figure 17

Maya Counting the Days Until Release



Another way that anticipating the release that was shown in the stories was asking if the incarcerated parent had been released yet. For instance, in *Welcome Home: Mommy Gets Out Today*, on the day of the release, both Bernice and Malika kept asking if “she is here yet” (Watson, 2015). In response, Bernice’s grandmother stated “No, she hasn’t ... She’ll be here in a few minutes though. Stop worrying yourself about her coming” (Watson, 2015).

Lastly, although *the release* is a happy day for most as noted earlier, it can also be secretive. For example, in *When Dad Was Away*, Milly noted, “On the day Dad was coming home, Milly was really excited. She wanted to tell all her friends at school, but she was scared

about what they might say, so she just whispered to her teacher” (Weir, 2012). This reveals that although Milly was excited for her father to come home, she was only able to disclose the release to her teacher as she did not know how her classmates might react. By keeping it a secret, Milly was preventing the potential teasing/stigma that could take place as evidenced by the literature on how stigmatizing parental incarceration can be.

Emotional and Mental Health Themes

Lastly, the fourth major theme identified within the sampled children’s books was the impact of stigma on the emotional and mental health of children. Specifically, in these stories, signs of *emotional and mental health* included depression, eating, and sleeping disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, anger, fear, sadness, grief, resentment, confusion, and lower levels of self-esteem (Hardy, 2018; Merenstein et al., 2011; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Purvis, 2013). Based on the various aspects of the story, I identified several additional subthemes, which included *blame*, *confusion*, and *challenges in coping with new situations*. This section will highlight how the books exhibit impacts on emotional and mental health due to the child’s experiences with parental incarceration.

Toll on Emotional and Mental Health

To date, several studies have documented parental incarceration’s impact on children’s emotional and mental health (Brown & Gibbons, 2018; Hardy, 2018; Merenstein et al., 2011; Murphey & Cooper, 2015; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Purvis, 2013). In the current study’s sample, *toll on emotional and mental health* refers to the negative emotions that the child feels concerning parental incarceration. As noted previously, feelings of sadness, loneliness, anger, anxiety, and mixed emotions were experienced by children of parental incarceration (Brown &

Gibbons, 2018; Hardy, 2018; Murphey & Cooper, 2015; Merenstein et al., 2011; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Purvis, 2013). As such, this section will explore the range of negative emotions that children of parental incarceration experience and how they manage.

First, in several stories, child characters expressed a range of mixed emotions such as relief, anger, and grief (Hardy, 2018) that are associated with parental separation over a long period of time. For example, in *Kofi's Mom*, “Kofi felt angry because his mom had gone away. Sometimes he felt frightened, sometimes he felt sad, but most of all he missed her,” reveals the range of emotions that Kofi felt regarding his mother’s incarceration (Dyches, 2010b). Similarly, in *When Dad Was Away*, Weir (2012) wrote, “At bedtime, Milly felt angry and confused. Dad sometimes went away to work, but he was never away for long and he always brought back presents. He was great at reading stories and putting on funny voices. It would all be different now”. Each of these quotes illustrates the efforts some books make to let children know that experiencing a range of emotions – both positive and negative – is normal.

Below, Figure 18 illustrates the range of emotions that children may experience (Bender, 2003).

Figure 18

Mixed Emotions



In addition, the idea of mixed emotions was raised in *My Daddy is in Jail*, as a child stated, “my feelings seem all mixed up” (Bender, 2003). Lastly, in *Far Apart, Close in Heart*, the book narrated “You may have different feelings at the same time, or one big feeling may push all the others away” (Birtha, 2017). As these quotes illustrate, stories for children of incarcerated parents made efforts to show their characters experiencing a range of emotions that often seemed contradictory. These narratives are in keeping with research on the effects of parental incarceration and, as a result, work to normalize these emotions for children.

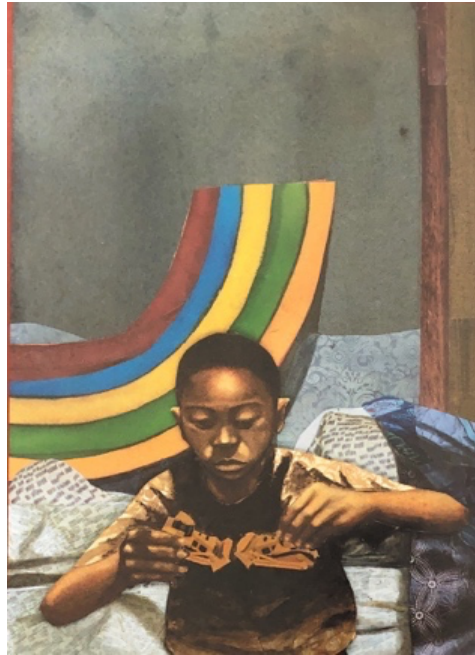
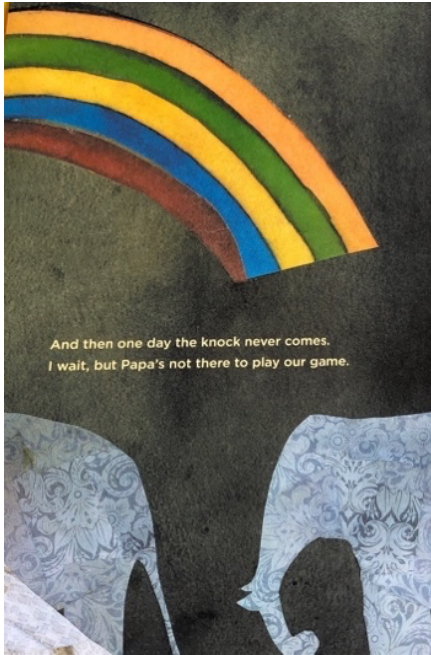
Another common theme that emerged in several books in the sample was the experience of mental health problems amongst child characters. Briefly, mental health problems are defined as internalizing problems including anxiety and depression (Hardy, 2018; Murray et al., 2012). In 14 stories, child characters were shown to struggle with mental health problems including depression and anxiety. For instance, in *What Do I Say About That? ... Coping with an Incarcerated Parent*, the main child character stated, “When I see other kids with their dads, I start to get depressed” (Cook, 2015). As shown in Figure 19, the rainbow is shown as facing upwards which indicates happiness (Beaty, 2013). But as the book moves on and the child learns about parental incarceration, Figure 20 illustrates the rainbow as upside down and torn off the wall (Beaty, 2013). This depicts that the child is feeling depressed as he plays with his toys.

Figure 19

Happy Rainbow

Figure 20

Depressed Rainbow



Another way in which the books depicted increased mental health problems was through anxiety. For example, in *Kennedy's Big Visit*, Kennedy's mother questioned, "Kennedy, are you hungry? Her mother asks. "No" Kennedy responds. Daphne knows that Kennedy is indeed hungry but is too anxious to eat." This conversation between Kennedy and her mother highlights that Kennedy may feel too anxious to engage in daily activities such as eating (Brooks, 2015). This further highlights the toll on mental health that children experience due to parental incarceration. As such, these stories provide readers with examples of the different type of emotions that children experience and suggest that these feelings are common.

In addition, across several stories in the sample, child characters were frequently shown to be struggling with sadness and loneliness as a result of their parental incarceration. These narratives are consistent with research that has found that feelings of sadness and withdrawal from peers and family are common mental health concerns among children of incarcerated parents. For instance, in *Doogie's Dad*, Doogie stated "I felt so sad. Do they think I haven't noticed that Dad is missing?" (Dyches, 2010a). Of particular interest, the above quote shows that

stories are not just intended for children. For adults and other support persons in a child's life, *Doogie's Dad* emphasizes the importance of direct conversations with children about parental incarceration.

Third, several books in the sample include anger which is a central emotional experienced by their child characters. For example, in *What Do I Say About That? ... Coping with an Incarcerated Parent*, the main child stated "It stinks not to have my dad around, and it makes me really mad," and "my anger builds up inside me, and I almost start to cry" (Cook, 2015). In another story, *My Daddy is in Jail*, the main child stated, "Sometimes I get mad at my mommy for making me keep a secret. Sometimes I feel mad at my daddy for getting into trouble and going away," which represents the multiple times that the child felt angry (Bender, 2003). Figure 21 illustrates the child as angry (Birtha, 2017). Rashid is also not playing soccer which is one of his favourite activities as he is too angry to.

Figure 21

Too Angry to Play



Thus, these narratives demonstrate to readers that it is normal for children to lose interests in things that they used to like and that experiencing higher levels of anger is normal.

Overall, the subtheme of a toll on emotional and mental health highlights the variety of emotions that children experience due to parental incarceration. By featuring these child characters as going through a mix of emotions, the stories aim to normalize and show readers that it is common to experience this. These narratives act as a helpful guide for caregivers to aid children going through these emotions.

Blame, Confusion, and Challenges in Coping with New Situations

Several specific emotions amongst child characters were constructed in the sample. Specifically blame, confusion, and how children dealt with new situations. Among seven stories, children often blamed themselves for why their parents were incarcerated. Further, stories in several books also explored the various ways in which children were confused as they lacked the information surrounding parental incarceration. Lastly, narratives in the books also illustrated how children coped with new situations that are often followed by parental incarceration. Thus, the following section will cover these three scenarios and aid in normalizing these feelings and new scenarios.

First, children in the stories were often depicted as blaming themselves for their parent's incarceration. This is demonstrated through their dreams and letters. For example, in *Doogie's Dad*, Doogie dreamt,

I dreamed Mom went to live in prison too. I dreamed that Rosie and I were left all alone. I dreamed that Mom and Dad were angry with me, that it was all my fault that they were in prison. (Dyches, 2010a, p. 8)

Additionally, in *Doogie's Dad*, Doogie stated, "The bad dream made me scream which woke up Mom. I told her all about the dream. She said, "Don't worry, Doogie. Everything will be okay.

It's not your fault that your dad is in prison" (Dyches, 2010a). This highlights the important role that caregivers can have when comforting a child of parental incarceration. Similarly, in *Far Apart, Close in Heart*, Yen writes a letter to her mother which states, "Why are you there? Is it my fault?" (Birtha, 2017). In response, Yen's mother wrote, "I am here because I broke the law ... It is *not* your fault" to ensure Yen that she is not the reason why (Birtha, 2017). Thus, these narratives suggest to caregivers that children of parental incarceration should be given more information surrounding their parent's incarceration as self-blame is seen as a consequence.

Second, the stories depicted the children giving their caregiver a reason as to why they believe their parent is incarcerated. This included children thinking that they were naughty or that they asked for too many things. For instance, in *My Dad's in Prison*, the main child character stated, "I was worried that Dad might have taken some new trainers for me because I kept asking for them. But Mum said it wasn't that, and it wasn't my fault at all" (Walter, 2018). Likewise, in *When Dad Was Away*, Milly said, "Mum, did Dad go away because of me? Because I was naughty?" Milly blurted out. "No love, none of this is your fault" (Weir, 2012). Again, Milly believed she was the cause as she was naughty, however, her mother ensures her that that was not why. Lastly, in *Our Moms*, Paul stated, "I did not understand what I did to make her leave," added Paul. "Did I play too many video games that upset her?" (Futrell, 2015). As such, these examples highlight the importance of caregivers reassuring the child that they are not to blame and that is normal for children to wonder if they are at fault.

Third, one of the books showed the progress that the child has made in regards to self-blame. After this child attended group counselling with other children who had an incarcerated parent, she stated, "It feels good to know that I'm not a bad person because of what happened to my family. It wasn't my fault" (Bender, 2003). Here, this sample aids to provide children relief

that they are not the reason why their parent is incarcerated and the importance of accepting the truth.

Moreover, children in the stories often lacked information surrounding their parent's whereabouts and thus may not know that their parent is incarcerated. As such, in 11 of the children's books, confusion was highlighted as an emotion that children often experience. First and foremost, the subtheme of *confusion* seemed to be included in some stories to highlight problems that emerge when adult caregivers elect to not discuss a parent's incarceration with a child. For instance, in *Doogie's Dad*, Doogie's mother did not answer him when asked where the father was,

But when I came home, Dad wasn't there... At dinner time Dad still wasn't home. "Where's Dad?" I asked, but Mom just told me to eat my spaghetti... At bedtime, I said, "Where is Dad?" but Mom just kissed me and said, "Time to go to sleep."
... Dad wasn't there the next day either, not at breakfast and not when I came home from school. (Dyches, 2010a, p. 2-3)

In *My Dad's in Prison*, the main child character stated, "Dad wasn't at home when I got back from school, I was disappointed because I wanted to show him the dinosaur I painted in my art lesson" (Walter, 2018). Similarly, in *Knock Knock, My Dad's Dream For Me*, the main child character lamented, "and morning after morning he never comes. He never comes to help me get ready for school. He never comes to cook my favourite scrambled eggs. He never comes to help me with my homework after school" (Beaty, 2013).

Each of these examples highlights the confusion and other negative emotions experienced by children when a parent's absence goes unexplained. As such, stories often explored how withholding information from children could be harmful despite the intentions. Some stories highlighted the real possibility that others in the child's day-to-day life, including peers, may already know what happened to their parent. In several stories, the authors explore how a child's

lack of knowledge about their parent's incarceration could be a source of bullying. For instance, in *Doogie's Dad*, Doogie said, "The next day at school, Ellie said to me, "My mom says your dad's in prison. Is he?" I didn't know, but I replied, "No, he's not" (Dyches, 2010a). Similarly, in *When Dad Was Away*, Milly stated, "They're saying Dad's in prison," said Milly, trying not to cry. "I told them he was away working, but everyone laughed at me!" highlights that Milly thought her father was working, when in fact he was in prison (Weir, 2012).

Furthermore, children who were told the truth were also confused. For instance, in *My Dad's in Prison*, the main child stated, "I asked Mum when Dad was coming home, but she said she didn't know exactly. I'm really cross with him, but I miss him too" (Walter, 2018). To avoid confusion, some of the books expressed the importance of having a conversation with the child to ensure they understand what is happening. For example, in *Our Moms*, Michael stated, "I thought it was cool when my grandma sat down with me the night after the police left my house to tell me what happened...She told me my mom had made a choice that led to a consequence" (Futrell, 2015).

Moreover, coping with a new situation such as a child's awareness of adults' needs and celebrating events was prominent in the children's books. First, children are acutely aware of the stresses that their caregivers go through and thus they worry for their caregivers and will try to support them. As such, statuses in caregivers may change due to parental incarceration. For example, in *The Night Dad Went to Jail ... What to Expect When Someone You Love Goes to Jail*, Sketch stated, "Things have changed since Dad went to prison. Mom works even more than she used to. Grandma helps take care of us now" (Higgins, 2013).

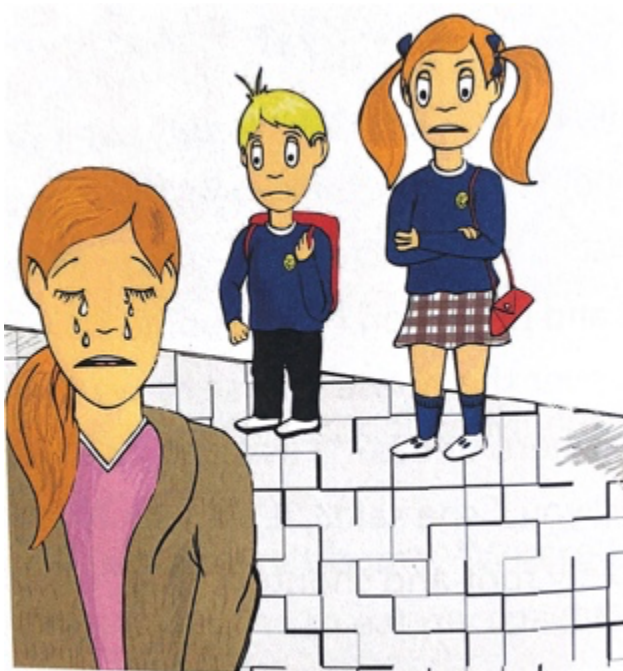
Next, children in the books were able to observe the strain or new responsibilities that the other parent has to do alone. For instance, in *What Do I Say About That? ... Coping with an*

Incarcerated Parent, the main child states, “My mom is doing the best she can to take care of my brother and me.” (Cook, 2015). In addition, in *Missing Daddy*, the main child states, “Mama works day and night. She’s always on her feet,” which further shows that the mother has had to work more due to being the sole income earner (Kaba, 2018). Thus, these samples suggest to readers that children are aware of new changes and that caregivers have to take on more of a responsibility when a parent is incarcerated.

Furthermore, stories emphasized the importance of children recognizing that their caregivers may also experience several emotions due to parental incarceration. In *What Do I Say About That? ... Coping with an Incarcerated Parent*, for example, the main child observes, “Sometimes her face is full of fear but she always says, ‘I’m just fine.’ Her eyes are so red because she cries a lot, and she’s tired all the time” (Cook, 2015). Figure 22 illustrates a mother crying while her two children observe in the background (Dyches, 2010a).

Figure 22

Witnessing our Mother Crying



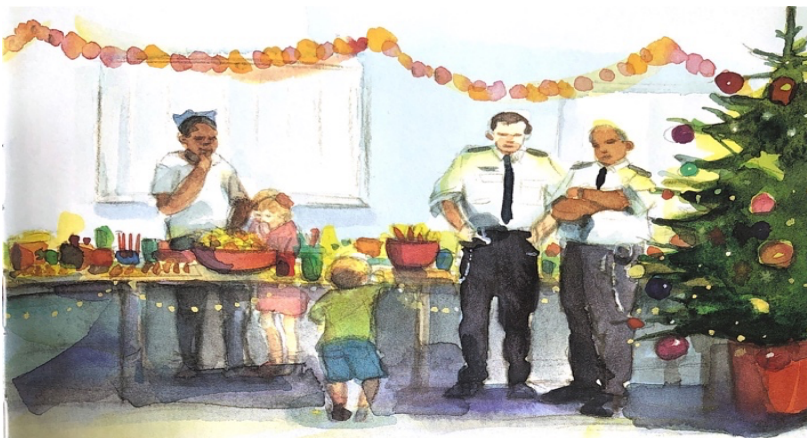
Another new situation depicted in the stories was common holidays and celebrations. Specifically, several stories depicted the absence of the incarcerated parent and its impact on celebrations. For example, in *My Daddy is in Jail*, the main child stated, “On my birthday, we had cake and ice cream with my grandma and grandpa. They gave me lots of nice presents, but nobody laughed and had fun like we used to” (Bender, 2003). Similarly, in *When Dad was Away*, Milly stated, “At Christmas, it was sad putting up the tree and the decorations without Dad. Everyone was talking about going to see Santa with their mums and dads. Milly felt left out” (Weir, 2012). However, in addition to normalizing feelings of confusion and/or sadness with a parent’s absence during celebrations, some stories made an effort to show children that there were many ways they could still share holidays with an incarcerated parent. During a family visit over the Christmas holidays, Milly describes:

When Santa handed out presents, the children waited for their names to be called out. “Milly and Sam!” Shyly, they went up for their gifts. There was someone taking photos. “Smile!” he said, and he took a picture of the whole family with Santa. (Weir, 2012, p. 23)

Figure 23 illustrates celebrating Christmas in the prison (Weir, 2012). The image shows that there is a Christmas tree, decorations, food and that there are two prison officers.

Figure 23

Christmas in the Prison



Thus, these stories aim to show readers that events can still be celebrated despite parental incarceration. It also demonstrates to readers that the prison can adapt visitations so that prisoners and their loved ones can still have a normal life.

To conclude, the subtheme of *blame, confusion, and challenges in coping with new situations* aims to provide readers that it is normal to go through these emotions. It provides an opportunity for caregivers to reassure the child of parental incarceration and have a conversation with them surrounding the information regarding their parent's incarceration. Lastly, the children's books aided in normalizing celebrations in a prison environment and imply that it is still possible to include the incarcerated parent. Thus, the subtheme of *blame, confusion, and challenges in coping with new situations* correlates with the *toll on emotional and mental health* as children often engage in negative emotions and have to learn how to adapt.

To summarize, the major theme of *emotional and mental health* included *toll on emotional and mental health* which looked at children exhibition negative emotions such as mixed emotions, increased levels of mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, feelings of loneliness, fear, and anger. Another subtheme of *blame, confusion, and challenges in coping with new situations*, illustrated the importance in normalizing children's feelings. In addition, these narratives demonstrated to caregivers the impact that they have on children and how to reassure them and the importance of providing their child with knowledge and truth. Thus, these subthemes aid in constructing the theme of *emotional and mental health* as the stories depicted the impact parental incarceration had on children and provided readers with knowledge on how to cope with these negative responses.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, I examined the content of 19 children's books on parental incarceration in an effort to understand how these stories and illustrations aligned with theory and aid children of parental incarceration. I used stigma theory as a theoretical lens when I theorized the data to see whether the content of the books aimed to counteract the stigmatizing process and provide strategies to help children better deal with stigma and cope with parental incarceration. Based on the data, my analysis is that these stories are constructed for the purpose of educating children – and their caregivers – on the realities of parental incarceration along with normalizing many of the experiences and feelings they may have - and that these narratives are largely aligned with existing research on how a child is impacted by the incarceration of a parent. I will start by having a discussion surrounding the results, relate it to the literature, and then move on to limitations and recommendations for future research.

In response to my first and second research questions of what themes emerged in the children's books on parental incarceration and what themes emerged in language when discussing incarceration and its effects on children, I found that there were four main themes, which included: *stigma*, *experiences with the prison*, *the parental bond*, and *emotional and mental health*. In the next few sections, each theme will be discussed along with its key findings and its relation to the literature.

Stigma

In the major theme of stigma, the subthemes that were found within it included: *courtesy stigma*, *bullying*, and *reducing stigma*. I believe that *courtesy stigma* focused on the stigma that children experienced due to the parent-child bond that they had with their incarcerated parent. Within the subtheme of *bullying*, I believe that children in the books were only bullied at school

if classmates knew about the child's incarcerated parent. As noted in Brown and Gibbons' (2018) research of studying the effects of parental incarceration they found that the courtesy stigma bond led children to be secretive about the incarceration as a means to hide the perceived stigma and shame that they believed came with having an incarceration parent. This strategy of keeping parental incarceration a secret was a tool that children used to reduce the stigma that they experienced. In the books, I believe that children also engaged in a form of de-identification in that they lied about their incarceration parent's location and employment which agreed with Thulstrup and Karlsson's (2017) research of children using de-identification as a form to cope.

Another strategy that aided children in *reducing stigma* was having a support system. In the children's books, I believe that friends, family, school counsellors, and teachers were often the main supports for children. In line with the literature, Merenstein et al. (2011) noted that having a positive role model was another form of support that children often need which the children's books did demonstrate. On the other hand, Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) questioned whether or not most boys had a positive male role model to look up to and found that many listed their mothers or close relatives as role models and that none of the participants were able to list a male role model. In the children's books, most of the boys had a female figure as their role model as the books did not include a male school counsellor and only one book had one male teacher. Further, research shows that children tend to go out of their way to conceal their parent's incarceration and thus may restrict their own access to formal or informal supports as a means to remove any perceived stigma (Saunders, 2018).

I also found that the books did not go in-depth about support programs for children of parental incarceration as the literature suggested with programs such as Nutmeg Big Brothers Big Sisters, Families in Crisis, and Mother-Child Program (Merenstein et al., 2011). However, in

one of the children's books that were analyzed, the school counsellor found a support group for one of her students. Lastly, the books mentioned teachers as a positive support system for children but in reality, research has also shown that teachers need to be further educated on the impacts of parental incarceration so that they could better support the child in need (Saunders, 2018).

Experiences with the Prison

In the second major theme of experiences with the prison, the subthemes that were found within it included: *children being worried about their incarcerated parents, feelings towards the prison, the night before the visit emerged, negative and positive incarceration visits, and the prisoners*. In the literature review that I conducted previously, I believe that the subtheme of children being *worried about their incarcerated parents* revealed that children had concerns about their parent's safety, emotional well-being and if they were lonely. Further, Hannem and Leonardi (2015) discussed how families knew that their incarcerated loved ones were being victims of violence, mistreatment and perceived abuse. Hannem and Leonardi also noted how children and families lacked notification for when their incarcerated loved one was sick, injured, or at risk. For instance, a sister of an incarcerated man was upset when she found out that he was sick for a while before his death in prison (Hannem & Leonardi, 2015). Thus, these books showed children being concerned for their incarcerated parent at a surface level when in reality, it goes deeper than just if the incarcerated parent is lonely. Lack of information between correctional staff and families also aids in the child and families concern for the incarcerated parent's personal wellbeing.

In regards to the other subthemes, I believe that the concept of secondary prisonization played a prominent role as the children's books compared the children's visitation experiences to

it being structured like a prison in the sense that they experienced physical confinement, restrictive rules, and scrutinized security checks (Knudsen, 2016; Murphey & Cooper, 2015). Similarly, Murray et al., (2014) noted that prisons are not child-friendly places and thus children can find the process of visitation distressing. Although the books highlighted some children's fears of visiting the prison, it did not show children's fears during the visitation as the books showed the visitation process as positive. I believe this positive visitation process was shown in the books to let readers know that prison is not *scary* to visit and to help remove that fear. Although positive, I believe the books should include more negative experiences as in reality, children who do visit their parents find the process of visitation distressing.

I also believe that in the subtheme of *feelings towards the prison and the night before the visit*, that most of the children's books showed children having mixed feelings. Children were shown as being too excited to visit the prison that they were unable to sleep the night before, and others were shown as afraid as they had nightmares and did not have a positive view of what prison was like. Both *negative and positive incarceration visits* ultimately highlighted the strength of the child-parent bond as those with stronger bonds had a more positive visit and those with weaker bonds experienced a negative visit. Interestingly, in Clopton and East's (2008) research, they found that children displayed behavioural reactions after visiting their incarcerated parents. Further, Poehlmann-Tynan and Pritzl (2019) noted that family visits contribute to less recidivism and higher well-being for incarcerated parent. Additionally, prison visits also reduce depressive symptoms for incarcerated women and reduced the incarcerated parent's rule-breaking behaviour whilst in custody. Thus, there are questions as to whom these visits directly benefit: if it is better for the child's well-being or the incarcerated parent's wellbeing considering that prisons are not child-friendly.

In the children's books, the experiences of the visitation seem to be positive in the way that children look forward to the next visit and do not show them acting out. However, Clopton and East also note that children experience frustration and fear upon visitation and thus may not be ready to visit their incarcerated parent (2008). In the final subtheme of *the prisoners*, I believe that the children's books that showed what the prisoners were like helped children in determining what prison was like and showed them that the activities the prisoners engaged in were relatable. Although these prisoner activities were relatable, they are more that goes into a prisoner's day. As such, the books do not include scenarios in which the incarcerated parent may be seeking mental health or substance misuse support, or scenarios in which association, exercise and shower times are limited. In some cases, prisoners may also lose visitation access due to poor behaviour whilst in custody or that visits can get cancelled last minute and as such may not be able to see their loved ones on the day of the visit. Similarly, the literature notes that in order for mothers to participate in extended visits in which they have full contact with their child and visits are 4-hours long, they must have been incarcerated for 60 days and show exemplary behaviour (Poehlmann-Tynan & Pritzl, 2019). As such, I believe these books paint a positive light in the prison experience as opposed to painting a more realistic image of what prisoners do daily.

The Parental Bond

In the third major subtheme of the parental bond, the subthemes that emerged included *still my parent and my role model*, *maintaining relationships*, *forgiving the parent*, *hope for the parent*, and *the release*, which demonstrated the strength of the child-parent bond and underscored for readers the idea that maintaining a bond with their incarcerated parent is still possible.

In the subthemes of *still my parent and my role model*, *prison distance*, and *maintaining relationships*, I believe that the children in the books had a strong relationship with their incarcerated parents, and were depicted as keeping in contact with their incarcerated parents via phone calls, writing letters, and visiting them in prison. In one of the children's books, the author showed video calls as an alternative for those who cannot afford to travel to prison due to the distance. I believe that the children's books' use of maintaining contact was similar to those that Correctional Service Canada (2019) has suggested. However, I believe that the children's books suggested that maintaining contact was easy and can be done without any financial barrier. Benslimane et al. (2019) research stated that phone calls between those in custody and the community are costly and may be a barrier for families. Murray et al., (2014) noted that families have disconnected their phones within 2 months of the parental incarceration due to the costs of calls. Knudsen (2016) also notes that the prison may be too far for families to travel to as it can also be costly. In the children's books, some of the children visit their parents weekly and are in constant communication with their parents either via letters or phone calls. However, studies suggest that there is a financial barrier and that maintaining contact can be a difficulty (Benslimane et al., 2019; Knudsen, 2016). Thus, these children's books should have included narratives in which phone calls and visits were unattainable due to costs and how the family is now a single income household.

Additionally, Murray et al., (2014) research showed children describing the visits as exhausting as it could be a 24-hour journey due to prison location. Further, children had to wait 30-60 minutes in a visitation area with nothing to do before they visited their incarcerated parent for a 20-minute visit in a noisy and crowded room (Murray et al., 2019). Although the books showed how positive the visits and the process once inside the prison was like, it did not depict

the realities of long wait times, long travel times, and how exhausting it could be to visit. Similarly, the books suggest that prison visits are an important coping mechanism for families dealing with parental incarceration, but also do not highlight how traumatic or difficult the visit can be. For instance, in Hannem and Leonardi's (2015) research, they note that families who visit often experience more intense surveillance and drug scanning procedures than those who are correctional staff.

On the other hand, seventeen children's books showed the children visiting their incarcerated parents. Two books did not show this as one talked about the release and the other book had a different plot. In Nesmith and Ruhland's (2008) study, they found that children named three reasons for not visiting their incarcerated parent. The three reasons found were (1) children did not want to visit, (2) caregivers did not want the child to visit, and (3) both the caregivers and the child did not know how to go about visitation (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Similarly, in Murray et al., (2014) they noted that visits can be limited because of long distance and costly travel, that visiting hours can overlap with school hours, and that the child might not have someone to accompany them. I believe that none of the children's books rejected the idea of visitation and instead showed negative incarceration visits where the child felt uncomfortable, afraid, or frustrated. When in reality, research has shown that approximately, 60% of incarcerated mothers and fathers do not receive any visits (Poehlmann-Tynan & Pritzl, 2019). Due to the books showing a lack of visits in which the child cannot attend or do not have the means to, these books may not accurately represent what the reality is for many child readers who are unable to visit their incarcerated parent.

Next, in the subtheme of *the release*, I believe that the majority of children in the books were displayed as feeling happy when their parent was released. Only one of the books showed

the child as unbothered and having anxiety as she had never met her mother who was getting released. Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) also noted that children exhibit signs of fear and anxiety impending the release of their incarcerated parent due to the fear that they had over the potential impact on their other parent; that is, they wanted to protect their other parent if their incarcerated parent was abusive. As the books did not discuss the types of crimes committed, this type of fear was never shown. Ultimately, I believe that the books illustrated children having a secure bond with their incarcerated parent and thus normalized the idea that a healthy relationship with their incarcerated parent is the norm. However, this may not be the case in reality as Murray et al., (2014) noted that families and children often experience additional difficulties when their incarcerated parent returns home as they have adapted new roles and thus having the incarcerated parent back disrupts these new adapted roles. Further, research has shown that ex-prisoners face significant barriers of re-integration into the community and as such these barriers may cause further burdens on the family. Thus, these books that paint a healthy relationship between the child and the incarcerated parent and may not be accurate for readers and the release day might not be a positive scenario for children.

Emotional and Mental Health

In the final major theme of emotional and mental health, the subthemes that emerged include *the toll on emotional and mental health, blame, confusion, and coping with new situations*.

In the subtheme of a *toll on emotional and mental health*, I believe that children in the books experienced a variety of negative emotions such as mixed emotions, anger, fear, feelings of loneliness, and increased levels of mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. I believe that all of these negative emotions came down to ambiguous loss theory which Boss

explains ambiguous loss as an unclear loss in which the parent is physically absent but psychologically present or vice versa (2007). This ambiguity affects children as demonstrated throughout the books as they are unable to understand this loss and process it like other losses such as having a loved one pass. Thus, children may exhibit negative emotions and may also experience disenfranchised grief which Brown and Gibbons (2018) define as a loss that is not publicly mourned. I believe that disenfranchised grief was prominent in the subtheme of *confusion* as most children were confused and did not know the information surrounding their parent's incarceration. Chiu et al. (2021) found that this confusion boiled down to their caregivers not wanting to provide the child with an explanation as a means to protect them from further emotional and mental distress.

Although the books displayed children of having these negative emotions due to the parental incarceration, it did not include narratives in which other factors such as poverty, racism and colonialism can contribute to these negative feelings. Thus, these books act as a starting guide to caregivers that encourages them to have an appropriate conversation with their child about parental incarceration to avoid any confusion and emotional and mental distress. To further help children understand their feelings, these narratives need to include more social problems in which children may experience that may have contributed to parental incarceration or the aftermath of parental incarceration.

Further, I believe the books could have catered to more of real-life children's experiences in which they witness their parents arrest and what trail could do to children. For instance, Murray et al., (2019) noted that children can have feelings of shock and bewilderment after witnessing their parents' arrest. Their research shows that 40% of children were present at the time of arrest, 27% of children saw weapons drawn, 20% of officers explained to children why

the arrest was being made, and handcuffing the parent was out of children's sight for only 3% of father's arrest and 30% of mother's arrests. Including scenarios like this may be beneficial for readers as these negative experiences could aid readers in relating to the stories more.

In the subtheme of *blame*, I believe that children in the books were quick to blame themselves and feel guilty for their parent's incarceration. The narratives in the books showed children coming up with reasons such as being naughty and asking for too many things as to why their parent was incarcerated. This finding is in keeping with studies that have shown that feelings of guilt are very common among children of parental incarceration (Hames & Pedreira 2003; Knudsen, 2016; Turanovic, 2012). Further, in the subtheme of *coping with new situations*, I believe that the books helped readers to adapt to celebrating events such as birthdays and holidays in a prison environment or without their loved ones. I also found that children in the books were more aware of the changes than caregivers give them credit for. In the books, the caregiver status was automatically made to be the other parent (the one not incarcerated) whereas one of the books showed the grandmother helping out.

Interestingly, the literature notes that children often experience up to three caregiver changes throughout parental incarceration (Denby, 2012), whereas in the children's books, multiple caregivers in a child's situation were not included in the books' content. This exclusion of caregiver status change from the books painted a positive picture in which the family dynamic stayed the same when the parent was incarcerated but does not show what it would be like if there were multiple caregiver changes, or if the child was young enough could live with their mother in custody, or a foster care scenario. I believe the exclusion of these scenarios in the books might not accurately represent what the reality is for many child readers who do experience parental incarceration. In addition, I believe that the books depicted children as being

in tune with their caregiver's emotions in that the children were able to understand when the caregiver was upset which would make the children try to not upset their caregiver further. In Nesmith and Ruhland's (2008) research, participants expressed their awareness of their caregivers' feelings about their incarcerated parent and described internalizing those feelings or not fully understanding those feelings. However, the literature does not address if the children tried to reduce their caregivers' feelings of sadness. I believe the child's awareness of the situation was added to the books content so that caregivers/readers have an understanding that children are more aware of their surroundings than they believe.

In response to my third research question: do themes within children's books address experiences of stigma and courtesy stigma, I believe that the answer was yes. As demonstrated in my findings, the children's books highlighted how children experience stigma and courtesy stigma negatively and how they dealt with this. Further, the books did show how children's fears of stigmatization impacted their ability to seek and access support in the community. However, I do believe that based on my understanding of the books, they represented caregivers and/or adult figures as also playing an important role in counteracting the stigmatizing process through ensuring that the child had a strong support network.

Lastly, to answer my final research question of what is the intended purpose of these children's books, my assessment is that they acted as a tool to help children of parental incarceration and to help caregivers or adult figures a starting resource on how to help children. According to Heath et al. (2005), bibliotherapy is the idea of sharing books or stories with the intent of helping others gain insight into personal issues. I believe that the idea of children, caregivers, or adults reading these children's books and using bibliotherapy as a form of help is beneficial. For instance, based on my understanding, I think children's books are something that

children could relate to because they are written in a way that attempts to help children understand that there is nothing wrong with them, they are not different from other children, that what they are feeling is not wrong, and that there is nothing bad about who they are as an individual. I think that the depictions of parental incarceration could aid children to process their feelings, learn how to cope with parental incarceration, and have hope for their situation. I believe that children's book provides caregivers and adult figures an avenue for how to: start a conversation with the child about parental incarceration; better understand how parental incarceration affects the child; respond to children's emotional feelings; and understand that children are observant and are aware of more than what adults believe.

Although, I believe that these books aim to help children of parental incarceration, I also believe that they cannot be the sole support that they receive, as I believe children need a range of supports from friends, family, mentors, teachers, and social workers, as well as counselling. I also believe that only a few readers can relate to these books as they only show some scenarios and that more books need to be written to include a variety of scenarios and more diversity in terms of child characters so that more children can relate to it and see themselves in the books. However, I do believe that these books help readers build empathy for those going through parental incarceration. Further, I do question how power operates here in the sense that are these books meant for children? I question whose interests are served by these books as correctional staff in the books are portrayed as being kind, when in reality, children have experienced not friendly behaviour from correctional staff.

Limitations

Although this study analyzed nineteen children's books, these books represent a smaller sample of the many children's books about parental incarceration that are available. A list of 50

children's books was initially compiled, however, I was only able to access fewer than half the books. From the children's books that I was able to access, I then eliminated the ones that did not meet my specific criteria which were, in brief:

1. address an aspect of parental incarceration (for example: witnessing the arrest, coping mechanisms, visiting a prison, what prison is like, etc.) as a central part of the narrative.
2. are specific to parental incarceration (for example, maternal or paternal incarceration and not a relative who is incarcerated; for example, uncle/aunts or grandparents who are incarcerated)
3. include illustrations
4. target audience is children under the age of 9
5. written in English

Because of these specific criteria, the findings may not be representative of how parental incarceration is depicted more widely in children's books. Next, the second limitation involved defining the category of "children's books," as my research followed the definition of a child – someone who is under the age of 18 – under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1990). However, the children's books that I analyzed needed to have illustrations which meant that the books were more likely to be for children in a narrower age group - those under the age of 9. Lastly, this research focuses on children of parental incarceration in a Canadian aspect and the books do not represent this as the majority of the books were not written by Canadian authors, nor did it touch on Canadian issues such as the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research for my study includes using a larger sample size of children's books that would include those books that are for ages 9 or older but still under age 18, as it would offer further, comparative data to examine how parental incarceration is depicted for children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child definition of a child. The sample could also be extended to include children's books that are available in a variety of foreign languages. Future research could also analyze other sources of reading materials (intended for children) such as magazines, poetry, and chapter books surrounding parental incarceration as well as include more scenarios such as witnessing the parent's arrest, diverse child characters to include more indigenous peoples and people of colour, and negative prison experiences. Further, future research could also look at the authors who write these children books to understand their background with parental incarceration and why they wrote the books, who the books were for, and what they thought the intended purpose of the books was.

In conclusion, this research provided insight into the role that children's books on parental incarceration have. Children of parental incarceration are often an unidentified demographic in Canada that is forgotten. Research has shown that having a parent incarcerated can lead to adverse childhood consequences for children (Turanovic et al., 2012). Still, there has been a lack of research in Canada regarding children of parental incarceration, and specifically their experiences with stigma and shame. This study aimed to understand the purpose of children's books that address parental incarceration, and found that four major themes emerged in the textual and illustrations in the books' content (1) stigma, (2), experiences with the prison, (3) the parental bond and, (4) emotional and mental health. The themes and subthemes that emerged provide children, caregivers, and other adult support figures an avenue on how to

address a sensitive issue appropriately, as well as aid their understanding of what children experience. These children's books highlighted a more positive light on children's experiences with parental incarceration, but did not cover the negative realities that many children experience when their parent is incarcerated. As such, I believe these books act as a guide for children and other readers to gain empathy for those of parental incarceration, but are not the only resource that children need to use in order to cope with parental incarceration as not all children of parental incarceration can relate to the positive narratives in the children's books.

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Appendix A

(2002 – 2019)

Title of Children's Book	Author	Illustrator	Year of Publication
Almost Like Visiting	Shannon Ellis	Katrina Tapper	2016
Anna's Test	Whitney Quinn Hollins & Kiki Kitty	Kiki Kitty	2019
Doogie's Dad	Richard Dyches	Edwin Garcia	2010a
Far Apart, Close in Heart	Becky Birtha	Maja Kastelic	2017
Hazelnut Days	Emmanuel Bourdier	Zau	2018
Kennedy's Big Visit	Daphne Brooks	Daphne Brooks	2015
Knock Knock, My Dad's Dream For Me	Daniel Beaty	Bryan Collier	2013
Kofi's Mom	Richard Dyches	Edward K. Hudson	2010b
Missing Daddy	Mariame Kaba	Bria Royal	2018
My Dad's in Prison	Jackie Walter	Tony Neal	2018
My Daddy is in Jail	Janet Bender	Janet Bender	2003
My Daddy's in Jail	Anthony Curcio	Anthony Curcio	2015
Our Moms	Q. Futrell	Clarissa Ferguson	2015
Sing, Sing, Midnight!	Emily Ridge Gallagher	Emily Ridge Gallagher & R. B. Pollock	2016
The Night Dad Went to Jail ... What to Expect When Someone You Love Goes to Jail	Melissa Higgins	Wednesday Kiran	2013
Visiting Day	Jacqueline Woodson	James Ransome	2002
Welcome Home: Mommy Gets Out Today	Jamantha Williams Watson	Jamantha Williams Watson	2015
What Do I Say About That? ... Coping with an Incarcerated Parent	Julia Cook	Anita DuFalla	2015
When Dad Was Away	Liz Weir	Karin Littlewood	2012