

Chapter 1

Mothers in Prison: The Impact of Race and Ethnicity

There is a long tradition in the United States of anxiety about the state of the family (Gordon 1988; Stacey 1990). The disappearance of the family unit, the undermining of traditional “family values,” the weakening of family bonds under the onslaught of a changing society, and accompanying concerns about the state of the family are not new issues. Recently, advocates and government officials have promoted public policies that are more family sensitive, that is, that support families. However, despite all the public hand-wringing about maintaining and supporting the family unit, there appears to be little interest on the part of the public or on the part of policy makers about the impact of harsh criminal justice policies on men, women, and their children. The war on crime has been characterized by some as a war on women, the poor, and minorities (Donziger 1996). The impact of the harsh sentencing policies that have a disproportionate effect on women, on the disadvantaged, and on people of color (Raeder 1993) is likely to grow more serious as changes in child-welfare policy and welfare reform also continue to evolve and work their way into local communities. The impact of strict and severe sentencing has meant that increasing numbers of children are affected by the imprisonment of their parents. As has been reported in the popular press, the populations of incarcerated men and women continue their twenty-year climb to unprecedented heights. At midyear 1998, more than 1.8 million men and women were confined in state and federal prisons and jails, accounting for 1 out of every 150 residents (Gilliard 1999). Although in 1996 the United States lost its international lead in per capita imprisonment to Russia and fell to second place, this nation is nonetheless

a leader in incarcerating its members, especially compared to Western European countries (Mauer 1997). Nationwide, women account for approximately 6.4 percent of the prison population and approximately 10.8 percent of the population in jail. While the numbers of male prison and jail inmates has increased by 150 percent between 1985 and 1998, the comparable percentage increase for women is 260 percent. Despite the fact that the number of women behind bars has been increasing, the dilemmas presented by larger numbers of imprisoned women echo those identified by those researching the history and development of women's prisons in earlier eras (Rafter 1997). Because women account for a relatively small number in increasingly large correctional enterprises, their needs and issues either are ignored or made to conform to the institutional norms, regulations, and programs designed with dangerous male inmates in mind.

This book examines how women manage motherhood from inside a women's prison. It is the result of participant observation and intensive interviews conducted over a three-year period. A central concern here is understanding how inmate mothers construct motherhood and do mothering while incarcerated. How women manage motherhood while they are incarcerated, how living arrangements for children are determined, and how relationships between mothers and their children are developed and maintained are the foci of this book. Special attention is paid to race and ethnicity and to families as these factors affect women in prison and their children.

In some demographic characteristics, the female population mirrors the male population. Both populations are made up of large numbers of ethnic and racial minorities. Forty-six percent of the females and 45.5 percent of the males are black; 14 percent of the females and 16.8 percent of the males are Hispanic. The median ages for female inmates and male inmates are thirty-one and thirty years, respectively; 62 percent of the women and 66 percent of the men have less than a high school education (Owen and Bloom 1995). However, women inmates differ statistically from male inmates in several areas. A higher percentage of women have members of their family in prison (47 percent of the women versus 37 percent of the men); they are less likely to be serving time for violent offenses (32 percent of females versus 47 percent of males); they are serving shorter sentences (mean of 105 months versus 153 months for men); and they are more likely to be

parents (78 percent versus 64 percent) than are their male counterparts (Snell 1994). Among the critical differences presented by male and female inmates are those that have to do with the importance of family and children. It is estimated that 80 percent of these women are mothers with children, and 66 percent of them have children under the age of eighteen (Bloom and Steinhart 1993). Seventy percent of these women were living with their children before incarceration (Snell 1994). Of the males, only 64 percent are fathers, as mentioned, and about a half of those inmates (53 percent) were living with their children at the time of arrest.

Arranging and managing the care of children of female inmates present incarcerated women and their families with a variety of tasks and burdens. Unlike male inmates, who may be somewhat peripheral to work associated with family caretaking and kinwork (Swan 1981), most female inmates lead lives that are embedded in complex arrangements of shared child care, pooled resources, and other strategies to enhance family survival. Their absence from their families often places the family itself in jeopardy.

Many have said about the recent incarceration boom that “we are not winning the war on drugs, but we are taking a lot of prisoners.” With the significant increases in the incarcerated population, the numbers of children who are affected by parental absence have also increased. The Bureau of Justice estimates that nearly 2 million children have parents or relatives who are in prison or in jail (Butterfield 1999). Because of the gendered nature of child care, most children of inmates had been living with their mothers prior to incarceration. Because of this fact, children of male inmates are less likely to suffer disruption in their living arrangements than are those of female inmates. Gendered differences in primary child-care responsibilities prior to incarceration mean that male inmates are more likely to be able to leave their children with primary care providers—that is, with the mothers of their children. Women, as customary primary caretakers, do not have the option in many instances to leave the children with husbands and partners, and must develop and identify other providers of care (Farrell 1998). These arrangements are sometimes mediated by the involvement of the state, in the organizational form of child welfare. In other cases, women and their families struggle to find places for children to live without the involvement of state agencies. In this chapter, I will

review the literature on where children of inmate mothers live while the mothers are incarcerated and on how women manage motherhood in prison. Factors related to the selection of places to live for children will also be investigated with special attention to race and ethnicity and to "paths to prison."

OPTIONS AND PATTERNS OF PLACEMENT

One important aspect of managing motherhood and mothering during incarceration involves the determination of living arrangements for children. Using a formula devised by Johnston (1995c), we can estimate that having 145,000 women in jails and prisons results in more than 230,000 children living apart from their mothers. Where children live during the incarceration of their parents depends upon the resources available to their parent(s). These options for placing children appear to be related to the sex, race, and ethnicity of their mothers, fathers, and other caretakers. National data on state prisoners reveals that 90 percent of the children of male inmates were likely to be placed or remain with their mothers as result of the imprisonment of their fathers (Snell 1994). For children of female inmates, incarceration of the mother was much more disruptive. Upon imprisonment of their mothers, 25 percent of the children were living with their fathers, 51 percent with grandparents, 20 percent with other relatives, 9 percent in foster care, and the balance in other placements (Beck and Gilliard 1995; Snell 1994). Most of these living arrangements reflected a change in where children were living before and during the incarceration of their mothers.

RESEARCH ON INMATES AS MOTHERS

Research on where children live while their mothers are incarcerated is limited. The studies that have been completed provide some important information about the impact that incarceration has, not only on the inmate but on her family, as well. Many of these studies focus on a particular aspect of the relationship between inmate mothers and their children while incarcerated and after release. Studies reviewed here include information on where children live while their mothers are incarcerated. These are summarized in table 1. One

*Table 1. Living Arrangements of Children of Inmate Mothers:
Summary of Research Reports (expressed as percentages)*

Placements of Children	Henriques (1982) (N=75)	Stanton (1980) (N=54)	Bloom & Steinhart (1993) (N=866)	Fessler (1991) (N=111)	Johnston (1995b) (N=500)
Husband	8.0	22	17.4	6.3	13.2
Grandparents	48.0	35	46.6	70.3	20.4
Maternal	36.0		38.4	53.2	9.1
Paternal	12.0		8.2	17.1	11.3
Relative	19.0	23	18.5		36.0
No state payment					23.0
Foster care					13.0
Foster care					
Strangers	19.0	10	7.3	10.8	26.3
Other	5.7	10	10.2	12.6	4.1

study by Bresler and Lewis (1986) does not include placement information on children but features an important discussion of racial and ethnic differences in family support for female inmates.

Henriques. In her study of how inmate mothers envisioned motherhood, Henriques (1982) interviewed thirty imprisoned mothers and fifteen of their children, along with caretakers in the community and institutional staff. With the exception of one white woman, all respondents were women of color (73 percent black and 23 percent Puerto Rican). The vast majority of these children were in relative care (65 percent), with fewer than 20 percent in state care. Women in this sample were strongly opposed to placing children in state care, yet also expressed concerns about the caretaking by relatives, in terms of their other responsibilities, age and health, and strain upon the relationship. In other words, placements with kin were not trouble free. Mothers expressed concerns about their relationships with their children and about maintaining their place in the home—that is, not being pushed out of their mother position while they were incarcerated. Caretakers and correctional staff characterized mothers as much less committed to and less capable of performing the role of mother than did inmate mothers themselves.

Stanton. Stanton's (1980) research examined the impact imprisonment had on the children of inmate mothers. Among areas investigated were changes in the child's living arrangement, school performance, legal socialization, and welfare status. This study compared children whose mothers were in prison with children whose mothers were on probation. Inmate children experienced more changes in residential placement and in school attendance than did children of mothers on probation. Many of the mothers interviewed were misinformed about details in the lives of their children and unaware of some of the difficulties they faced in school and in the community. The living arrangements of 118 children of 54 inmate mothers were as follows: 35 percent with grandmother, 22 percent with father, 23 percent with other relatives, 10 percent in foster care, and the balance in a mix of placements. While Stanton reported an ethnic and racial breakdown of the sample (32 percent white, 48 percent black, and 20 percent Hispanic), she did not report placements by race.

Bloom and Steinhart. Focusing on policy implications of the increased imprisonment of women, Bloom and Steinhart (1993) surveyed 430 women about their 866 children, along with correctional staff, caseworkers, and caretakers of children. Bloom and Steinhart found that despite the rapid increase in the population of incarcerated women, few programs had been developed to strengthen the ties between mothers and children during their imprisonment. Sixty-six percent of inmate mothers were members of minority groups, and many were living in poverty. Over half of the sample had not been visited by their children while they were incarcerated, in spite of the fact that 75 percent intended to live with their children after release. The great majority of caretakers surveyed (93 percent) reported that contact with the mother was helpful for the child. The authors examined the role of inmate mothers, caretakers, child welfare, and correctional authorities in addressing the needs of children, and they suggested the development of programs specifically designed to help this population. They reported a placement breakdown similar to that of other studies: 47 percent with grandparents, 17 percent with the father; 18 percent with other relatives; 7 percent in foster care; and 10 percent with friends or other arrangements.

Fessler. Fessler's (1991) study of fifty mothers examined reunification plans developed by inmate mothers and followed mothers into the community for a second interview. Although most mothers planned to live with their children upon release from prison, few had prepared detailed plans to accomplish this. During incarceration of their mothers, only 6 percent of the children were living with the father; 17 percent lived with the father's family, 53 percent with the mother's family; 11 percent were in foster care; and 9 percent lived with the mother's friends. Four percent of these children had been adopted. Fessler reported that after release, 73 percent of the mothers were reunited with their children. The population was 52 percent white, 30 percent African American, and 18 percent Hispanic.

Johnston. In a more recent report, Johnston (1995b) studied the child-custody problems of 160 male and 500 female inmates. She found that children of male inmates were less likely to experience disruption in living arrangements. However, she reported a much lower percentage

of male prisoners' children with their mothers than other studies. This was attributed to the increasing imprisonment of these women. In this study, foster care was used by families when both parents were imprisoned. For children of female inmates, Johnston found that 20 percent were with grandparents, 13 percent were with fathers, 36 percent were with relatives, 26 percent were in foster care, and 4 percent were in other living arrangements.

Most significantly, Johnston discovered that mothers stated that the more troublesome placements were not with foster care but with relatives other than maternal grandparents. This suggests that mothers exerted more power and influence in managing relationships with foster care and with their own mothers than they did in some other relative arrangements. Johnston did not examine the placement data by race and ethnicity, nor was the racial makeup of the population disclosed.

These studies of where children live while their mothers are incarcerated show some interesting differences in the placement resources inmate mothers have at their disposal for child care. Overall, grandparents appear to be the most frequent providers of care for these children, with other relatives also an important resource. Husbands and foster care with nonrelatives or strangers provide less care. The reasons for the varying utilization of these resources are complex. One factor that has not received sufficient attention is the impact of race and ethnicity and class on the placement of children.

THE IMPACT OF RACE AND ETHNICITY ON CHILD PLACEMENTS

There are some studies that do report the relationship between the race and ethnic characteristics of women inmates and where children live. These are summarized in table 2. According to data collected in a comprehensive 1991 survey of women in state prison and jails, race and ethnicity of inmate mothers appeared to be linked with differential use of placements for children (Snell 1994). White children were more likely to live with fathers (35 percent) than were black (19 percent) or Hispanic (24 percent) children. Grandparents were more likely to be the caretakers of black children (57 percent) and Hispanic children (55 percent) than of white children (41 percent),

*Table 2. Living Arrangements of Children by Race and Ethnicity:
Summary of Research Reports (expressed as percentages)*

	Snell (1994) (N=4000)			Baunach (1985)* (N=285)		
	White American	African American	Hispanic	White	African American	
Grandparents	41	57	55	23	51	
Other relatives	15	24	23	23	29	
Father	35	19	24	29	10	
Nonrelatives (foster, friends, institutions, and alone)	22	13	15	25	10	
	Zalba (1964)** (N=460)			Glick & Neto (1977)*** (N=4263)		
	White American	African American	Hispanic	White	African American	Hispanic
Grandparents				28	56	45
Other relatives	50	74	58	34	30	31
Father	25	6	13	17	4	13
Nonrelatives (foster, friends, institutions, and alone)	25	10	29	21	10	11

*Using a chi-square test, Baunach found the differences in placements by race to be statistically significant ($p < .001$).

**Zalba combines grandparents and other relatives in the "other relatives" category. Data on placement with fathers was imputed here from information provided in her research.

***Glick and Neto's study included 214 women who were Native American or other race. These cases are excluded from this table. Ethnic differences in child-care arrangements were significantly different at $p < .001$.

and white children were twice (12.6 percent) as likely to be in foster care as other children (6 percent for black and Hispanic children). This statistical report did not suggest any reasons that might explain these racial and ethnic differences in placements.

Baunach. One work that did include a racial and ethnic breakdown of placements looked at the impact of mother's imprisonment on both mothers and children. This study examined the living arrangements of 285 children of 190 mothers incarcerated in two states, Kentucky and Washington (Baunach 1985). Half of the mothers in the study were African American and the other half white. Children of white women were more likely than children of African American women to be placed in foster care (25 percent versus 10 percent); black children were more likely to be placed in the care of grandparents (51 percent versus 34 percent) and in the care of other relatives (29 percent versus 23 percent); and white children were more likely to be placed with their father (25 percent versus 10 percent). Although these differences were reported as statistically significant, Baunach did not examine factors that may have contributed to these.

Glick and Neto. In a nationwide study of services and programs for incarcerated women, Glick and Neto (1977) assessed the needs of and programs available to incarcerated women. Their research found that although 80 percent of the population had children under the age of eighteen, only about 56 percent of these parents were living with their children prior to the time the women were imprisoned. They also reported that the likelihood of mothers living with their children decreased with each subsequent incarceration. Glick and Neto's survey of over forty-four hundred respondents found a statistically significant difference in living arrangements for children depending on the race and ethnicity of their mothers. Despite the significance of this finding, the researchers did not speculate on the reasons for the divergent patterns of placement.

Zalba. Zalba (1964) also reported the differential use of placements for children of 460 white, African American, and Mexican mothers. Only 10 percent of the African American women relied on foster care, compared to 25 percent of the whites and 29 percent of the Mexican

Americans. Similarly, 74 percent of the African American women used relatives other than the father for placements, compared to 50 percent of the whites and 58 percent of the Mexican Americans. Unlike most others writing in this area, Zalba questioned these differences.

This fact poses questions for consideration. Is it that the internal sub-cultural values of Negroes militate against placing children outside the family? Or is the status quo more closely related to the differential availability of social services, including foster care facilities, depending on the client's ethnic characteristic? (1964, 188)

Zalba's observations are especially important, as they bring to the surface some significant issues about cultural and structural determinants of where children live.

Bresler and Lewis. Bresler and Lewis (1986) examined the impact of family ties on black and white female inmates and found sharp differences in the incarcerated population with respect to a variety of family demographics and dynamics. Although the authors were interested in family-related issues, no data were presented on the placement of children. Black women were more likely to have been raised in single-parent female-headed homes (62 percent), while white women's families of origin were more likely to be two-parent families (95 percent). In this sample, only 20 percent of the white women were living with their children prior to incarceration, compared to 54 percent of the black mothers. Only 20 percent of the white women expected help from their family after their release, while a majority (54 percent) of black women reported that help would be forthcoming. Additionally, white women identified available family help by naming only one sibling or a parent, while black women detailed a wider network of help, with potential assistance from aunts, cousins, grandparents, and in-laws, in addition to parents and siblings.

Bresler and Lewis (1986) suggested that, for black women, families provided an extensive source of support and that imprisonment did not bring with it factors of isolation that seemed to accompany the incarceration of white women. White women's estrangement from their families pushed them to rely to a greater extent on boyfriends, casual contacts, and other sources of support. Although the authors did not

provide detailed data on the placement of children in their research, they did find important differences in the family resources available to white and black women. They were silent about whether the lack of services from foster care may, in fact, be affecting the patterns of placement for African American and Hispanic children, as suggested by Zalba (1964).

Some clear patterns emerge from these four studies: African American and Hispanic women were more likely to rely on grandparents and other relatives for child placement than were white women, and white women more typically relied on husbands and foster care. Although these research studies were conducted over a thirty-year period and with samples that ranged from less than three hundred women to more than four thousand, the existence of common patterns may reflect some significant differences in the population that have not been directly explored by scholars. What accounts for these differences in placement by race and ethnicity, and what impact do these differences have on how women think about and do “motherhood” on the inside? As shown below, the incarceration event itself brings into sharp focus the possibilities, limitations, and expectations associated with making child-care arrangements for children. The response of families to incarceration of an inmate mother and her ability to enlist, accept, or reject care from kin reveals important and significant differences among women and their families. Some of these differences reflect racial and ethnic differences in family forms. These differences may also be evidenced in the means and paths by which women enter into crime.

WOMEN, FAMILIES, AND CRIME

As a result of incarceration, inmates confront several challenges and suffer what Sykes (1958) refers to as the “pains of imprisonment.” For men, this pain revolves around loss of freedom, autonomy, personal security, heterosexual relationships, and the deprivation of goods and services that can be found in the larger society. For women, the pains of imprisonment revolve around family relations, specifically separation from children (Henriques 1982; Kiser 1991; Neto and Bainer 1983; Stanton 1980), the loss of the maternal role, and, possibly, the

legal termination of her rights to her children (Haley 1982). The loss of maternal duties and roles is especially difficult for women who are concerned about the whereabouts and well-being of their children.

Separation of mothers and children is likely to cause significant problems for children, especially those from families who have little familiarity with the criminal justice system and those who are children of first-time offenders (Lowenstein 1986). Mothers who had lived with their children prior to incarceration and assumed major responsibility for their care were often the most distressed and least satisfied with the care provided for their children, whether this was given by foster parents, relatives, or spouses. Dissatisfaction was especially prevalent if that meant disruption in the child's living arrangement. In some instances, mothers had voluntarily given responsibility for children to other relatives. However, in other cases, relatives had moved into the central child-care role in the absence of the mother's performing her mothering responsibilities to their satisfaction (Hunter 1984).

Some research notes that despite criminal involvement and incarceration, inmate mothers are as committed to values associated with parenting as a comparison group of noncriminal mothers on welfare (LeFlore and Holston 1989). Other literature notes that some inmates are conflicted about motherhood and their ability to be good parents for their children. These women had become mothers at an early age and had delegated responsibility for the care of their children to older females in their families or had relied on foster care for long-term child care. They had also persisted in criminal lifestyles throughout early adulthood (Thornburg and Trunk 1992). The simple fact of giving birth and having family ties did not, as some might theorize, signal the end or diminution of a criminal career for many in this population (Daly 1987).

The availability of suitable living arrangements for children is of concern not only to the incarcerated woman but also to her family, child-welfare authorities, and others involved in her treatment and custody. In many instances, child welfare will place a child with the inmate's family if that family appears suitable and stable. However, these arrangements may be haphazard if they are made at the time of arrest. In some cases, potential caretakers are already overburdened with other child care and other family responsibilities and may have

limited resources to extend to additional children in crisis (Dressel and Barnhill 1994). Grandparents taking care of children of drug-addicted mothers find themselves economically, psychologically, and emotionally exhausted, with few sources of support from other kin or from public and private agencies. This is especially the case for grandparents living in communities that have been negatively affected by drug trafficking and high levels of crime (Burton 1992). In the absence of support services for family care providers, children run the risk of being cared for by kin who are under extreme stress and who may be unable to provide quality child care (Hungerford 1996). Foster care, often the least desirable placement from the point of view of mothers in crisis like addicted or inmate mothers, may provide better care for some children, in terms of financial resources and time and attention from caretakers, than do placements with relatives and family members (Gaudin and Sutphen 1993).

Limited as it is, the research on mothers in prison usually recommends increased visitation between mothers and children to facilitate reunification and to maintain mother-child bonds. In some cases, it is argued that enhancing the connections between mothers and their children will lead to improved chances of the mother's not returning to prison (Showers 1993). One of the shortcomings of this research is that it assumes that all inmate mothers are equally connected to their roles as mothers. For some mothers, plans for reunification are unrealistic and vague rather than doable and specific; and some mothers may view incarceration as a respite from family responsibilities and may not be interested in visitation during incarceration (Hairston 1991). In one of the few research studies that examined inmate mothers' commitment to and performance of mothering, Martin (1997) followed a group of mothers five years after release to track relationships between mothers and their children. In this study, approximately 66 percent of the mothers maintained relationships with their children that the author characterized as "connected." After incarceration, these "connected" inmate mothers resumed or adopted major responsibilities for child care and maintained custody of their children over a five-year period. However, during this period, approximately one-third of the population had lost custody of their children. The mothers' legal rights to the children had been terminated by the court, and many of these children had been adopted.

Several characteristics distinguished connected and noncustodial mothers. Connected mothers were more likely to have supportive relationships with the caretakers of their children, were less likely to have involvement with substance abuse, and were less likely to engage in criminal activity after release. Noncustodial mothers were more likely to suffer from chronic drug dependence and to persist in criminal behavior; they were less likely to have had significant relationships with their children prior to incarceration. As Martin (1997) noted, although the great majority of women expressed the wish to be mothers and to be reunited with their children, for many this desire was seriously compromised by their inability to provide stable and consistent care for their children due to serious involvement with substance abuse and crime.

PATHS TO PRISON AND THE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN

How women offenders are recruited to criminal lifestyles may be related to the sorts of placements arranged for children during the incarceration of their mothers. Several sociological theories have attempted to explain the underrepresentation of women in crime by focusing on women's relationship to the family as a social institution. Social control and containment theorists, like Hirschi (1969) and others (Rosenbaum and Lasley 1990; Toby 1957), argue that the closer and more attached individuals are to family, friends, and schools, the less likely they are to become delinquent. These bonds insulate them from the potentially criminogenic factors in their environments and push them to conform more closely to informal means of social control, like gender-specific norms governing conventionality and avoidance of damage to reputation (Heidensohn 1995). Other theorists hold that women's dependence on the family unit maintains social control over their behavior (Kruttschnitt 1981). Women with family responsibilities are less available to commit crimes because of the overarching and powerful responsibilities of child rearing and family maintenance. They are dependent, as well, on the family unit for support, making deviant behavior less likely than it is for men.

Historically, women in conflict with the law were thought to be estranged from their families and to have minimal contact with and support from family and kin. While this theory may have explanatory

power concerning some women, it is also important to recognize that family may also provide an important entry and path to crime for women as well. In *Street Woman*, a study of female hustlers, Miller (1986) examined the impact of race and ethnicity on "paths to prison." She suggested that the sources of criminality among black, white, and Hispanic women were quite different and that these differences were closely related to family organization. As Miller reported in her study, responsibilities for child rearing and family support may, in fact, lead women to pursue illegal means to enhance family survival.

While some families may exert the sort of social control theorists suggest, Miller (1986) demonstrated how embedded female offenders were in networks of relationships involving family members. The family, rather than being a protection against a criminal lifestyle, as suggested by Kruttschnitt (1981), in fact may enable and nurture a life of crime. Through family networks access to criminal opportunities, like drug trafficking and hustling, may be as available for some females as it is for males. The embeddedness of criminal opportunities and family networks may make crime-free lifestyles even harder to maintain for women than they are for men (Arnold 1994). According to Miller, access to criminal lifestyles for black women was eased by family members. While the caretakers of young women sought to protect their charges from life on the street, criminal opportunities were afforded by relatives, boyfriends, or other individuals. Miller referred to this as domestic network recruitment.

Access to criminal lifestyles for white women took a different path. These young women, reared in nuclear families, acted out at a young age, ran from parental supervision or maltreatment, and found themselves on the street, where male protectors introduced them to the rigors and attractions of the fast life. Unlike the black women, who maintained contact with both conventional and lawbreaking members of their families and acquaintances, these white women were estranged from their families and not in contact with them. Miller (1986) typed this as the runaway path.

Entering criminal lifestyles to support drug habits characterized paths to lawbreaking for Hispanic women. In this path, women turned to crime after becoming seriously involved with drugs. Miller (1986) noted that white women in her study were more protected from paths to crime than either Hispanic or black women. Black women had all

paths open to them—domestic networks, running away, and drug use—while Hispanic women did not have the domestic network path but instead became involved in crime through drug use and running away from home.

Miller (1986) also noted that many of these women were mothers; some of them were involved as principal caretakers of their children, others were helpers to principal caretakers, and still others were estranged from their children and their children's caretakers. White women were more likely to have given children up for adoption or have them placed in foster care. For black women, a child was more often cared for by the child's grandmother or other female members of the family network, an arrangement usually taken for granted.

There is a clear racial/ethnic difference here. Whites seem not to have developed the pattern of child-keeping characteristic of poor minority members. Even where the mother of a white woman takes care of her daughter's children, the gesture is more likely to be seen as act of generosity than as an unquestioned matter of duty. (1986, 121)

Miller's observation here is an important one, as we will see below.

Since Miller's analysis was published in 1986, there have been additional studies of women's paths to prison or serious involvement in the criminal justice system. In Daly's (1994) study of women in New Haven's felony court, she identified five paths taken by women to serious involvement in the criminal justice system. In her examination, street women accounted for approximately 25 percent of the cases. Other categories included harmed and harming women (38 percent), battered women (13 percent), drug-connected women (15 percent) and other (10 percent), the latter including women without prior arrests or involvement with the criminal justice system. In her deep sample, Daly discovered that most women had alcohol and drug dependencies, half had psychological problems, several had relationships with violent men, and many had family members or boyfriends who were involved in drug sales and use. Although Daly found some differences in the paths taken by white, Latino, and black women, these were not significant.

In her study of jailed women, Richie (1996) examined the impact of race on women's experience with violence in relationships. Comparing

differences between black battered women, white battered women, and black women who were not abused, Richie found that black women who were most likely to be abused were those who held unrealistic expectations of relationships and those who were more likely to excuse violence from partners. Richie refers to this as the “gender entrapment model.” Battered black women who were more likely to have been the favored child eventually limited their originally high aspirations to attempt to manage abusive relationships and criminal careers. White battered women, on the other hand, saw themselves as the least favored sibling when they were growing up and, as a result, were eager to leave their family of origin. Many experienced abuse in relationships they entered after leaving their own families. Unlike battered black women, white women expressed little family loyalty and connections, characterizing their relationships to family as originating more out of obligation than out of affection.

Black women who had not experienced violence recalled themselves as average children and identified strongly with female caretakers. Their loyalty was more directed to the larger community of black people rather than to members of their families. Unlike battered black women, they did not envision that a relationship with a partner would provide them with a stable, secure life for themselves and their children, and they were, like their mothers, somewhat dismissive of the role of men in their lives. As Richie shows, family membership has significant impacts on whether and how women encounter violence in their relationships and how that may lead to involvement in crime and drug lifestyles. Relying on conjugal relationships appears to be a dangerous strategy of survival for some women, as Richie suggests, especially for certain black women.

In their work on women in conflict with the criminal justice system, Richie, Daly, and Miller all focused on the importance of family in developing criminal careers and in balancing and negotiating family, criminality, and addiction. For women with children, these connections become even more complex. With a criminal justice policy designed for dangerous repeat offenders applied across the board to nonviolent criminals, we can expect that increasing numbers of women and their children will suffer the consequences of a war against drugs and the poor. Documenting the impact of these policies was an important impetus in undertaking the present study.

MANAGING MOTHERHOOD IN PRISON

This research had its origins in fieldwork done at a women's correctional facility in the northeastern United States. As of midyear 1999, this facility housed an average daily population of approximately 250 inmates, 190 sentenced and 60 awaiting trial. The state has no beds that are classified maximum security. Female inmates are housed in two buildings that formerly served as hospitals for the mentally ill. All inmates who are sentenced to serve a sentence are sent to this facility, as there are no local jails.

Access to the prison was made possible by the warden of the facility. As a volunteer and researcher in a prison-based parenting program, I spent time with mothers and their children in an extended visiting program. My initial interest was in learning about the operation of the parenting program, but after a few months at the site my focus moved to how women inmates managed motherhood while incarcerated. My interest in questions that surfaced during the fieldwork led me to the second stage of research, which involved twenty-five in-depth interviews with inmate mothers. The research methodology following the general outline of grounded theory (Charmaz 1983; Strauss and Corbin 1990) is fully explained in the afterword.

These interviews, together with extensive field notes, provided the basis for the research findings. In my analysis, five major strategies emerged as central foci for the management of motherhood in prison. These included arranging and managing caretakers, demonstrating fitness as mothers to official agencies and other audiences, managing motherhood tasks and identities, negotiating ownership of and rights to children, and balancing motherhood, crime, and drug abuse. These five challenges revealed the very real differences between inmate mothers in the management of motherhood. As shown in the following chapters, these are not the result of imprisonment alone but reflect important cultural, class, and racial/ethnic distinctions in the meaning and enactment of motherhood across the social landscape.

SUMMARY

The major aim of this book is to understand how mothers manage motherhood while incarcerated and to arrive at a deeply textured

examination of how women inmates understand and enact motherhood and mothering in this setting. Here, the voices of inmate mothers talking about mothering in prison are given center stage. As noted by many scholars, mothering under any circumstances is challenging. Doing mothering while in prison becomes a nearly impossible task, given the constraints of the setting and given what we as a culture suggest mothers should be and do with respect to their children.

Like other arrangements that must be made by families in crises, determining where children will live is an important one. Here the incarceration event was examined as if it were an independent variable. Where children live while their mothers are incarcerated reveals important dynamics in family organization, not just in individual families but in the location of those families in larger cultural and social milieus. By investigating this population, I contend, it is possible to reveal some of the social forces affecting families in contemporary America, especially as these relate to race and ethnicity. If some families are more ready to accommodate children during the imprisonment of their mothers, what does this reveal about the elasticity and inelasticity of families? What are mothers and others are expected to do *vis-à-vis* these children while the mothers are incarcerated? How are family obligations and expectations, the placement of children, and the management of motherhood related to how women think and enact motherhood while incarcerated?

In chapter 2, I will review the literature on motherhood and family and suggest how race and ethnicity are related to conceptualizing motherhood within and apart from families. I will also discuss the particular challenges inmate mothers face in doing motherhood and in claiming identities as mothers in a correctional setting. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 examine how women manage motherhood from the inside and how managing motherhood fashions mother trajectories or careers. These chapters make extensive use of the interviews done with inmate mothers. In the final chapter, I will summarize the findings and conclusions based on this examination and discuss implications of this work for policy and program development. In the afterword, I review the research methodology and discuss challenges of conducting research in a women's prison.