

An Intersectional Look At Black Women's Experiences In Texas Prisons

by

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Sociology,
College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in Sociology

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University of Houston
April 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the steadfast assistance that Dr. Kwan, Dr. Baumle, and Dr. Gibson-Light provided to my thesis. I would also like to thank the University of Houston Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program for providing me with the Blanche Espy Chenoweth Graduate Fellowship. This work would not have been possible without that financial assistance.

ABSTRACT

My project examines incarcerated Black women's experiences of forced labor, family separation, and abuse in Texas prisons. I conducted 14 virtual interviews with Black adult women who were formerly incarcerated in Texas. I recruited my sample using non-purposive sampling and snowball sampling. My study is informed by the history of slavery, the development of prisons after the Civil War, and "violence by other means" theory. It is also informed by intersectionality. Specifically, my project aims to understand how incarcerated Black women's experiences may vary by social class. Extant literature on prisons finds racial and gender-based differences in prison labor and that prison labor is coerced and mostly unpaid. I find similar evidence; however, I also find limited evidence of consensual, beneficial labor outcomes for women with relatively higher educational and occupational prestige.

My findings are also in line with past research on family separation that reveals incarcerated mothers lose a degree of contact with their children and families. However, some women discussed having a great deal of support and contact from their families, often depending on their families' financial investment. Research on prison abuse focuses on sexual and physical abuse and reveals risk factors and patterns of assault. While my research shows some evidence of sexual and physical abuse, the abuses women reported were primarily verbal and medical. My project extends current research by examining Black women's experiences of forced labor, family separation, and abuse in Texas prisons, as well as revealing more positive sentiments about incarceration. In this way, my project provides rich, detailed descriptions from formerly incarcerated women about the infrastructure of Texas prisons.

Keywords: Women's incarceration, Texas, Black women, prisons, labor, family separation, familial support, abuse

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UHGS V1:1 062019

Women are the fastest-growing demographic in U.S. prisons; their numbers have increased at almost two times the rate of men's since 1985 (Brown, Gilliard, and Snell 2005). Female incarceration has increased throughout the world. However, the United States has the highest rate of female incarceration (Kajstura 2018). The mass incarceration of women is a pressing issue. However, incarcerated women are often overlooked since they are a minority in the overall prison population, which is primarily composed of men (Swavola, Riley, and Subramanian 2016). Special attention is needed to address incarcerated women's unique issues (Crenshaw 2012).

The global increase in women's incarceration started in the 1970s. Many scholars attribute this increase to the War on Drugs, which began in the same decade (Reynolds 2008). This campaign issued a change from rehabilitation to punitive measures for drug users. Accordingly, in 2000, 40 percent of criminal convictions that placed women in prison were drug crimes (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2000). Scholars also frequently cite globalization as a driving force of global mass incarceration. Sudbury (2010) asserts that the neoliberal policies of globalization often criminalize sex workers, drug users, drug dealers, and other vulnerable populations that operate outside the formal market (Reynolds 2008). With globalization and increased incarceration rates has also come the increased use of prison labor, in which people in U.S. prisons receive below the minimum wage if any compensation at all (Reynolds 2008; Kang 2008).

Most of the research on prisons has been provided by prison ethnographies and surveys. This research examines the conditions of prisons including forced labor, family separation, and abuse. Several ethnographies have provided rich documentation of prison labor operations and conditions (Buck 2004; Haney 2010; Gibson-Light 2019). The research reveals the existence of

prison labor stratification. People of different status characteristics tend to receive different work assignments within prison based on their social capital (Gibson-Light 2019). Within the facility, a clear job hierarchy exists. Research has also shed light on the coercion tactics that staff use to force people in prison¹ to work (Buck 2004).

Prison researchers have also documented mothers' separation from their families during incarceration. The bulk of the research on family separation has relied on surveys and secondary data analysis to generate statistical trends concerning mother-child contact and visitation (Lawrence, Stepteau-Watson, and Honoré-Collins 2007; Glaze and Maruschak 2008; Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza 2008). The sources show that mothers lose a good amount of contact with their children upon incarceration, and these children's lives are disrupted. Some literature also focuses on the negative life outcomes children experience when their mothers are incarcerated (Trice and Brewster 2004; Lawrence et al. 2007; Poehlmann 2010; Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza 2018). One prison ethnography was unique in analyzing incarcerated mothers' feelings toward being separated from their children (Jackson 2011).

Lastly, researchers have examined sexual and physical abuse within prison. Survey research has revealed trends and risk factors of sexual and physical abuse (Alarid 2000; Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson 2006; Wolff, Shi, and Blitz 2008; Wooldredge and Steiner 2012; Solinas-Saunders 2012). Qualitative interview research has enabled a more in-depth understanding of the conditions of abuse (Blackburn, Mullings, and Marquart 2008). The

¹ Many incarcerated people prefer "people-first language," such as "person in prison" and find words such as "inmate" and "offender" to be disparaging (Cox 2020; Solomon 2021). As such, I have used this preferred language throughout my thesis.

research on abuse reveals various patterns in assault, risk factors, and differences between men's and women's prisons and their respective assault rates and conditions.

Some theoretical approaches to prisons include the concept of intersectionality and the "violence by other means" theory. Patricia Hill Collins and Kimberlé Crenshaw provided a framework for intersectionality. Collins (2016) explained how individuals belong to various social categories, and their various power relations intersect and influence their social outcomes. Crenshaw (2012) argues this framework can be used to explain the different outcomes in prison for women of different identities. For instance, the way a woman is treated in prison may be influenced by the intersections of her various social categories, including her race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability status, and more. In this way, using intersectionality is one strength of my project. Another theoretical framework I will also use is the "violence by other means" theory to consider how America's history of oppressing and segregating people of color continues through the criminal justice system.

Finally, the extant research mainly focused on southern prisons but none focused specifically on Texas. This state requires special attention, as Texas incarcerates a greater number of women than any other state in the United States (Kajstura 2018). Texas' unique structure might influence women's response. For instance, Texas' large geographic size might lead to a greater distance between incarcerated women and their families. Rather than pay people in prison for labor, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) offers "good conduct time," or some time off of the prison sentence (TDCJ 2016). Incarcerated people receive "work time" for the days they have spent working. This unique incentive system could affect labor outcomes inside prison and thus requires further investigation. Also, the massive population and general overcrowding in Texas prisons might cause increased chances for assault, as some

research has indicated (Gaes and McGuire 1985; Lahm 2008). I fill a gap in the existing women's prisons research by focusing on Black women's experiences in Texas prisons specifically.

While previous researchers have studied currently incarcerated men and women, my project focuses on formerly incarcerated women. I achieve my goal by conducting semi-structured interviews with recently formerly incarcerated Black women. The main objective of my study is to understand how Black women experience forced labor, family separation, and abuse in prisons, and whether these outcomes vary by sexual orientation and class. I hope to gain more revealing responses from formerly incarcerated women because they have had some distance from the prison system and are no longer under its confinement. Furthermore, the women may be more honest since they are no longer incarcerated and vulnerable to potential backlash for providing sincere answers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Slavery and the Development of Prisons

Many academics have established links between pre-and post-Civil War conditions and the conditions of prisons today. Weld (2011) provided documented stories from enslaved people that reveal abuse, family separation, and forced labor. The stories show that women were separated from their children and sold to different families. Women were often sexually assaulted and raped on plantations, and they toiled alongside men in the fields (Weld 2011). After the Civil War, slavery was abolished. During Reconstruction, the United States, and particularly the South, relied on new ways to control and exploit Black Americans for labor. Browne-Marshall (2013) explained how southern states instituted so-called "black codes" to limit African Americans' newfound freedom. If a Black person violated these codes or laws, they

were fined or taken to jail. Bardes (2016) explained how strict vagrancy laws allowed for police to mass arrest recently emancipated persons. In New Orleans during Reconstruction, men arrested for vagrancy, White and Black alike, would often receive a sentence at a workhouse for several months (Bardes 2016). In this way, policing and prisons became a mechanism for segregating Black and lower-class Americans from White society. It also became a mechanism for free labor (Smith and Hattery 2008).

In January 1865, a few months before the official end of the Civil War, the 13th Amendment was passed, abolishing slavery except for those convicted of a crime. The 13th amendment states: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction” (U.S. Constitution, Amendment XIII, Section 1). Thus, the thirteenth amendment allowed for an exception to slavery: imprisoned people could be forced to labor for no compensation. In many ways, the operation of slavery simply continued through the mechanisms of policing and prisons. Convict leasing became popular in the South during Reconstruction. Incarcerated African-American men would be leased out to plantation owners to labor in the fields while shackled (Smith and Hattery 2008). This practice appeared almost indistinguishable from plantation slavery. Smith and Hattery (2008) argue incarceration and prison labor became a tool of capitalism similar to the slave plantation economy that exists to this day. Today, incarcerated men and women are forced to perform various forms of manual labor without keeping their fair share of the profit (Reynolds 2008; Kang 2008). A pre-and post-Civil War analysis is crucial to consider when analyzing the current conditions in prison. Men and women are still being separated from their families, forced to labor, and abused in many ways inside American prisons.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for my project relies heavily on the concept of intersectionality. Intersectionality was coined by critical race theorist and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1970s. This concept was developed as a response to a mainstream, one-dimensional view of power and oppression. Intersectionality recognizes how people fit into different social categories such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation, nationality, ability, etc. Collins (2016) argues these categories are not discrete, but they build on each other to form overlapping oppressions. For instance, Black women experience their race and gender separately. Their social identities compound in a way incomparable to the experience of Black men or women of other races. Intersectionality is also important to recognize privilege. In the case of a cisgender, able-bodied, wealthy White man, his various social categories build on each other to form overlapping privileges. Patricia Hill Collins (2016) asserts these power relations intersect and influence social outcomes, and intersectionality can be used as an analytical tool for framing and addressing social problems.

An intersectional approach is important to use when studying women in particular. Samuels and Ross-Sherrif (2008) argue there is no collective, monolith experience of “womanhood,” so gender cannot be the only frame to consider. Using this framework demands that researchers consider ways in which different women experience different outcomes. As previously mentioned, some women, namely women of color, experience unique, overlapping oppression as they navigate social structures and institutions. Crenshaw (2012) used intersectionality as a lens through which to view the mass incarceration of women in the United States. Crenshaw contends that most dominant discourse on mass incarceration focuses on race and leaves out a gender analysis. This tends to happen because the majority of prisoners are men,

and Black men specifically are disproportionately sentenced to prison. However, Crenshaw (2012) argues that women need specific attention. Women experience varying levels of state control, surveillance, and punishment based on factors such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, migration status, and more (Crenshaw 2012). Crenshaw (2012) encourages scholars to consider how women with very marginalized identities, such as transgender women and immigrant women, are vulnerable to particularly punitive measures when incarcerated in facilities.

“Violence by other means” theory provides another important framework for my project. Fabio Rojas (2017) argues that the overt racial violence of past centuries, in the form of mob violence and slavery, continues in different forms. Today, this violence remains veiled by the criminal justice system (Wacquant 2002; Rojas 2017; Hunt 2020). In this way, states control lower-class, primarily nonwhite populations through prison in a way that is largely socially accepted. Accordingly, some theorists see prisons as a mechanism for enacting violence against People of Color in a way that does not violate the government’s values of equality and integration (Wacquant 2002; Rojas 2017; Hunt 2020). “Violence by other means” theory can also be found in mainstream social movements around prisons. Many anti-death penalty advocates draw parallels between the lethal injection of today and lynching of the past (Innocence Project 2015). However, it is worth noting that some *Washington Post* and *USA Today* reporters have investigated that lynching still occurs across the country today, but police departments often attribute Black Americans hanging by trees to suicide (Culver 2020; Newell and Estacio 2020; Patton 2020; Brown 2021).

Some authors have used “violence of other means” theory to explain the origin of prisons (Wacquant 2002; Hunt 2020). For example, Cecil Hunt (2020) asserts that after Jim Crow segregation was ruled unconstitutional, prisons became the new mechanism of segregating

Black Americans from society. She contends that this segregation by prison was a way to suppress Black people's progress and to maintain the status quo of white supremacy. Hunt (2020) views prison labor as reminiscent of the past slavery and convict labor systems; incarcerated workers produce items for the state and outside companies with little to no compensation. To summarize, Hunt sees the past repeating itself in a new form by a new institution. Wacquant (2002:1) echoes Hunt's (2020) perspective, stating that "slavery and mass imprisonment are genealogically linked" and that you cannot understand one without the other. Other authors have provided different explanations. Julia Sudbury (2010) cited mass incarceration, community defunding, globalization, and the War on Drugs as major factors in increasing incarceration rates. Sudbury (2010) also introduced the concept of the prison-industrial complex or the complex mechanism by which private prison interests have affected government policy and caused incarceration rates to skyrocket to supply free labor. Altogether, the concept of intersectionality and the "violence by other means" theory provide the theoretical framework for this research.

Empirical Research

Forced labor. Much of the literature on prison labor comes from detailed interviews and ethnographies inside prison. Racial inequality in prison labor is one major theme in many of these sources. Several different researchers have provided evidence that race, ethnicity, and class affect work outcomes (Crittenden, Koons-Witt, and Kaminski 2018; Gibson-Light 2019; Haney 2010). Michael Gibson-Light (2019) examined prison labor inequality by performing a prison ethnography. Through a carnal ethnography of incarcerated men, he found evidence of penal labor stratification. Different men had different work outcomes inside prison, and these outcomes were affected by their race, ethnicity, and class (Gibson-Light 2019). Gibson-Light (2019)

explained that competition exists within the prison for certain jobs, and there is a hierarchy of positions with certain perceived value. In his view, a man's race and class will affect where they are assigned in the job hierarchy.

Racial differences exist, but how are they formed? Crittenden, Koons-Witt, and Kaminski (2018) offered one explanation, stating that racial stereotypes and gender-role expectations largely dictate work assignments in prison. The researchers also referred to the concept of intersectionality, explaining that many of these stereotypes relate to the intersections of one's race and gender. For instance, Crittenden and colleagues (2018) found that non-Black women of color have significantly higher odds of working in facilities services compared to White women. Facility services include laundry, maintenance, janitorial service, food preparation, and so on. In our society, these tasks are highly racialized, and thus it comes as no surprise to the researchers that these stereotypes extend to prison (Ro, Brown, and Fremstad 2020).

Similarly, Crittenden and colleagues (2018) found that Black and non-Black men of color are less likely than White men to be assigned to public work positions such as road maintenance and grounds work. Black and non-Black men of color are also less likely than White men to receive pay for their work. The researchers attributed this disparity to White privilege, especially White male privilege (Crittenden et al. 2018). Gibson-Light (2019) offers social capital as another explanation for stratification. White males carry social capital that helps them attain more respected jobs. Gibson-Light (2019) defines social capital in prison as having connections with staff and other influential prisoners. He explains that prison staff and administration primarily consist of White men, who in turn, tend to trust White people with higher-status prison labor than people of color. Because of this social capital, prison officials falsely believe White men to be better equipped for more respected jobs. In addition to social capital, Gibson-Light

(2019) discovered that social class also plays a role in prison labor outcomes. For instance, he found that “linguistic capital” was an integral factor in the hiring process (Gibson-Light 2019:137). Prison officials may deem certain vernacular, such as African American Vernacular English, to be informal. This “linguistic capital” is heavily connected with social class and may be associated with race as well.

Prison labor outcomes have important consequences, for researchers have determined that one’s work assignment and experiences in prison can likely impact employment upon release (Haney 2010; Gibson-Light 2019). Gibson-Light (2019) explains how men with higher-status labor positions in prisons receive better jobs after prison. Therefore, the White men who are favored for better prison work assignments are often better equipped to work upon release. In this way, prisons and the system of stratified prison labor further perpetuate social inequality. Haney (2010) elaborated on this point of social mobility, explaining the racial and class-based dimensions of prisons. Haney believes prisons keep low-status people in their place by deterring social mobility. Low-income, primarily nonwhite populations are incarcerated disproportionately, and then they are released into society with little to no marketable skills. In this way, prisons keep minorities from receiving the proper training or rehabilitation to advance in society (Haney 2010). Gibson-Light, Haney, and Crittenden and colleagues provided a vital perspective on prison labor inequality, and their research highlights the need for an intersectional approach to analyzing prison labor.

In addition to racial differences, gender-based differences exist within penal labor. White men are more likely to be assigned to skilled labor positions than their female counterparts (Crittenden et al. 2018). Women in Texas prisons have fewer opportunities for skilled labor training than men (Greene 2018). Texas men’s units offered 27 more courses than women’s

units, with topics such as bricklaying and truck driving (Texas Criminal Justice Coalition 2018). As previously established, people often fare better after prison if they were able to develop a marketable skill on the inside. Therefore, women are not given the same opportunities in prison to succeed upon release as men. The justification for this discrepancy is unclear. However, as Crittenden and colleagues (2018) argue, people in power consider some individuals more fit for certain work than others. These assumptions are rooted in stereotypes, regardless of whether differences in ability or competency exist.

However, incarcerated men and women share some similarities in their labor. Crittenden, Koons-Witt, and Kaminski (2018) found in their nationwide sample that 37 percent of men and 41 percent of women in prison worked in “facility services.” Although this line of work is often gendered as feminine labor, men and women participate in this labor at similar rates. The researchers also found that 38 percent of men and 33 percent of women in state and federal facilities received pay for their labor (Crittenden et al. 2018). Thus, the majority of incarcerated people are not paid. This discrepancy in pay rate is not large, with only 5 percent more incarcerated men than women receiving pay. However, considering how large the prison population is, 5 percent is no small number. It is worth noting that only about a third of women in prison receive pay, so about two-thirds of women labor for free (Crittenden et al. 2018).

Additional research has explored labor conditions and the complexity of women’s attitudes toward their labor (Buck 2004; Haney 2010). Buck (2004) revealed that many women expressed resentment for being coerced to labor, while some women expressed gratitude for having an activity to do to pass the time. However, Buck (2004) explained that women have no choice but to participate in their assigned work. Women’s failure to comply with labor is punished, and thus the labor is coerced. Haney (2010) supported this assumption, arguing that

incarcerated women are made to engage in capitalist mechanisms to cause profit for others. She detailed how prison labor and private prisons are linked. Haney does not view prison labor as a constructive task in women's life but as a form of exploitation. Haney and Buck both revealed some insight into incarcerated women's labor and the role it plays in their lives.

In summary, each piece on prison labor was so rich with detail because all but one author chose to perform an ethnography. The extant literature revealed the conditions of prison labor and how prison labor recreates inequality. The extant literature on prison labor was also useful in revealing mechanisms that form this stratification, such as individuals' varying levels of social capital and perceived capability based on stereotypes. The authors showed evidence that prison labor is coercive, and is thus forced labor, which may be considered slavery. While the extant research provided a great deal of perspective, further analysis of prison labor is needed to address this complex phenomenon.

Family separation. The extant literature demonstrated that incarcerated women experience separation from their families. Several researchers have quantified the degree of separation between mother and child (Lawrence, Stepteau-Watson, and Honoré-Collins 2007; Glaze and Maruschak 2008; Jackson 2011). Lawrence and colleagues (2007) performed secondary data analysis of a cross-sectional survey to reveal the relationship between incarcerated mothers and their girls between 10 and 17 years of age. This study provided salient information related to mother-daughter contact. The results revealed that 80 percent of girls did not visit their mothers and around half lost contact after the arrest (Lawrence et al. 2007). These results are important because they show the large degree to which women are separated from their families during incarceration. Jackson (2011) also found evidence of separation through her observations, field notes, and semi-structured interviews with 24 incarcerated mothers at the

Kentucky Correctional Institute for Women. She found that 16.6 percent of mothers had no contact with their child while 66.6 percent received visits (Jackson 2011). These numbers may seem more optimistic than Lawrence and colleagues' (2007) study, but Jackson's sample size of 24 is much smaller. Furthermore, all the women in Jackson's (2011) study were primary caregivers before incarceration; thus, they all had existing relationships with their children before the study.

Both Jackson (2011) and Glaze and Maruschak (2008) found that half of the offenders in their samples had phone contact with their families. While phone calls are important, face-to-face contact is crucial in relationships. However, this face-to-face contact is evidently more difficult to attain. Glaze and Maruschak (2008) performed secondary data analysis of a 2007 survey of state and federal prisoners. They determined that, on average, these incarcerated parents had more mail contact than visits with their children. Over three-quarters of parents received mail from their children to some degree, yet only 42 percent and 55 percent of federal prisoners received visits with their children (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). Lawrence and colleagues (2007), Glaze and Maruschak (2008), and Jackson (2011) provided different statistical results on separation. However, all three studies revealed that family separation does occur and that incarcerated mothers lose a varying degree of contact with their children. While it is not explicitly mentioned in the research, it is important to note that visiting and making phone calls to a loved one in prison costs money.

Other researchers have assessed that children of incarcerated mothers experience negative life outcomes (Trice and Brewster 2004; Lawrence et al. 2007; Poehlmann 2010; Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza 2018). Several researchers have looked at how children are rehoused after their parent's incarceration (Glaze and Maruschak 2008; Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza 2018). Glaze

and Maruschak (2008) found that when children are rehoused, they are more often sent to live with the other parent or relatives rather than to the foster care system. However, Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza (2018) found that children of incarcerated mothers are often rehoused with families with a history of abuse. Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza (2018) claim that incarcerating mothers exposes the children to harm.

Researchers have also found that children of incarcerated mothers are at risk for negative social and academic outcomes (Lawrence et al. 2007; Poehlmann 2010). Lawrence and colleagues (2007) found daughters experienced negative social outcomes after their mothers' incarceration such as antisocial behavior, fighting, and pregnancy. Also, children of incarcerated mothers often suffer academically through truancy, dropping out, failing, and getting expelled (Lawrence et al. 2007; Poehlmann 2010). However, Trice and Brewster (2004) found evidence that for adolescents, there is an association between more contact with the mother and decreased instances of suspensions and school dropouts. Thus, it is important for the child's well-being that they have contact with their incarcerated mother. Children of incarcerated parents are also at increased risk of substance abuse and incarceration (Poehlmann 2010). Altogether, it is evident that maternal incarceration and family separation negatively impacts children.

Lastly, one qualitative interview study was unique in looking at the sentiments of incarcerated mothers rather than the outcomes of children with incarcerated parents. Jackson (2011) documented the lived experience of mothering while incarcerated. She found that mothers often felt remorse for past actions, saying they let their child down or did not do a great job. However, they often said they felt motivated to change and perform as a mother in the future. Women often reported feeling like they were missing out on major milestones in their children's

lives. While women gave varying responses, the most unifying theme amongst responses was hope for the future.

In sum, research on family separation revealed a general loss of contact between children and their incarcerated mothers. Some studies sources revealed how children's lives are negatively impacted by their mothers' incarceration. The majority of the aforementioned research similarly did not delve as much into the mother's outcomes or attitudes toward separation. Most studies focused on the outcomes for children of incarcerated mothers. However, the results are valuable in that they provided evidence of family separation and weakened relationships from incarceration. They reveal that prison walls drive a wedge between families.

Abuse. Research on prison abuse revealed sexual and physical abuse inside women's and men's prisons (Alarid 2000; Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson 2006; Blackburn, Mullings, and Marquart 2008; Wolff, Shi, and Blitz 2008; Wooldredge and Steiner 2012; Solinas-Saunders 2012). Many of the sources focused solely on sexual abuse. Blackburn, Mullings, and Marquart (2008) gathered detailed responses on assault by conducting face-to-face interviews with women inside large southern prisons. They explained the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) of 2003 that was meant to address the rampant rape problem in facilities and provide increased data on prison rape. Although PREA was a step in the right direction, further action is needed to address and prevent rape within facilities as assault in prison is still commonly occurring (Blackburn, Mullings, and Marquart 2008).

Just five years after PREA, the researchers found that 17.2 percent of women in their sample reported having been abused in prison (Blackburn, Mullings, and Marquart 2008). This percentage is notable, but also most likely an undercount due to many factors. Alarid (2000) argues that women may underreport sexual assault cases due to blurred understandings of

coercion and assault. Blackburn and colleagues (2008) also found that the majority of women, 68.4 percent of respondents, had experienced sexual abuse in the past. This figure is concerning because it suggests that women with potentially unhealed trauma are being punished by the criminal justice system rather than helped. Although greater attention has been granted to abuse in men's prisons, incarcerated women's experiences of abuse are increasingly gaining academic investigation (Blackburn et al. 2008).

Researchers explored the effects of past sexual trauma as well as risk factors associated with sexual assault. Mullings Marquart and Hartley (2003) argue this history of abuse can influence women's actions. In particular, women with histories of sexual abuse were prone to dangerous behaviors from drug use to criminalized activity to unprotected sex (Mullings et al. 2003). These results have important implications for anyone studying women's prisons; specifically, that one's approach should be trauma-informed. Leanne Alarid (2000) surveyed large southern county jails about sexual coercion and discovered associated risk factors to assault, including sexual orientation and physical ability. The author used an intersectional approach, stating that not all incarcerated people were equally vulnerable to assault. Bisexuality or homosexuality, as well as disability status, can make people in prison more vulnerable to victimization in general.

Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (2006) noted that a greater percentage of incarcerated women identified as bisexual or homosexual than men, 16 percent and 5 percent respectively. These findings have implications for how researchers should pay special attention to queer women's issues in prison since they are not a small group. Other researchers found evidence for higher rates of female homosexuality. Blackburn and colleagues (2008) found that 26.3 percent of incarcerated women in their sample identified as bisexual or homosexual.

Huggins, Capeheart, and Newman (2006) conducted interviews and surveys with incarcerated people and prison staff in two Texas women's prisons on the topic of dyads in prison. They found that 16.7 percent of the 214 women were in a current sexual relationship with another woman, and 22.5 percent had been in a queer sexual relationship in the past. Thus, researchers need to acknowledge sexualities other than heterosexuality. Taking the prisoner's sexual orientation into account becomes even more important when considering that homosexuality is a major risk factor in assault.

Some sources included comparisons between men's and women's sexual abuse in prison. Alarid (2000) gathered data on both men's and women's prisons and drew comparisons between the two samples. She examined frequencies of assault and made comparisons by sex. For instance, Alarid (2000) found that women reported fewer sexual assaults than men. As previously stated, Alarid (2000) inferred that this lower reported rate may be due to women's desensitization to sexual coercion and blurred understandings of consent that were expressed in surveys. Rates of sexual assault vary widely by study, with some reports indicating very low rates of sexual assault for men (Wholff, Shi, and Blitz 2008). Wolff and colleagues (2008) found that rates for sexual assault were below five percent in all racial categories. However, it is important to note that these are self-reports. Men might underreport sexual assault due to overwhelming conceptions of masculinity and internalized homophobia.

Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (2006) conducted a similar survey, yet they compared data on men and women imprisoned at medium-maximum Midwestern facilities. The researchers asked about the frequency of assault, the number of perpetrators, the relationship to the perpetrator, and more. Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (2006) found that women in prison are more likely than men to be sexually assaulted by staff members. Thus, researchers

cannot look at sexual assault between incarcerated women alone. Researchers must also examine the power dynamics among correctional officers and women in prison and the potential for abuse that exists within that relationship.

In addition to sexual assault, physical abuse is another major topic in the empirical research on prisons. Researchers have identified different risk statuses in either committing or experiencing (Gaes and McGuire 1985; Solinas-Saunders 2012; Wooldredge and Steiner 2012). One major risk status is a lack of connection to family (Solinas-Saunders 2012; Wooldredge and Steiner 2012). Solinas-Saunders (2012) found that childless, unmarried, and less-educated men are more at risk of being physically abused. Wooldredge and Steiner (2012) had similar results, finding that visitation, custody score, and family status are risk factors in being abused. In other words, an incarcerated person is at risk the more disconnected she is from the outside world. Solinas-Saunders (2012) also found how important a connection to the outside world can be. She used a linear regression model to assess the odds ratio of committing and experiencing verbal and physical assault.

Solinas-Saunders determined that verbal assault often precedes physical assault, so she measured them together. She found that receiving work assignments and telephone calls decreased one's odds of committing assault by 19.5 and 23.7 percent respectively. These results indicate how important it is for incarcerated people's safety and their behavior to be connected to the outside. Solinas-Saunders (2012) also found that the odds ratio for committing verbal and physical assault was greater for men than women and for older people than younger people in prison. These results surrounding age contradict older, previous studies that found that younger people are more likely to commit assault than older people in prison (Gaes and McGuire 1985; Cunningham, Sorenson, and Cutler 2007).

Lastly, Solinas-Saunders (2012) reported that the odds ratios for committing assault are greater for drug users, people with mental health issues, people with a history of abuse, and those with a greater number of previous arrests. Cunningham, Sorenson, and Cutler (2007) examined capital offenders in a Texas prison and found an inverse relationship between rates of violence and the severity of the assault. In other words, the more serious the assault, the fewer people report participating. While 37 percent of the men admitted to violent action, none reported committing homicide. Altogether, the research on physical assault in prisons revealed that several risk factors are associated with committing and experiencing physical assault. Furthermore, the research is important in illustrating how risk factors can intersect, as in the case of education and family status, to make an individual more vulnerable to assault.

Research revealed racial patterns in physical abuse, too. Wolff, Shi, and Blitz (2008) used a purposive survey sample of 6,964 people incarcerated in 12 male prisons to analyze victimization. The questions addressed physical violence in addition to sexual assault. The researchers described the “color line,” or the system of segregation in prison that largely separates most people into the categories of “White,” “Black,” and “Hispanic.” This is a rough grouping based on majorities, given that far more ethnicities are represented within prisons. Thus, the researchers chose to divide their sample by White, African-American, and Hispanic. Wolff et al. (2008) found that people of color, compared to their non-Hispanic White counterparts, were more likely to report victimization by staff. However, non-Hispanic White respondents reported the highest rate of victimization by other incarcerated people (27.6 percent) compared to African-Americans (17.9 percent) and Hispanic respondents (22.0 percent).

Overall, rates of victimization are about even when considering Black and Hispanic people were more likely to be abused by staff, and White people were more likely to be

victimized by other incarcerated people. . Lahm (2008) provided additional racial analysis on assault: the frequency of incarcerated person-on-person assaults increases as the proportion of non-White people increases within a prison population. These racial trends in victimization can be helpful in better understanding prison assault; however, prison researchers must not engage in any racial essentialist thought. Prison abuse is a complex issue, and race is only one of many factors at play.

Verbal assault, specifically from guards to people in prison, is a topic that is largely ignored by the empirical research on prisons. In his collection of essays titled *Asylums*, Goffman (1961:xiii) offered descriptions of total institutions, or “of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life.” Although his fieldwork was based in mental institutions, he drew parallels between total institutions like mental facilities and prisons. Goffman (1961:23) explained how staff often use “verbal or gestural profanations... call[ing] the individual obscene names.” He attributed these profanations as part of the “mortification of the self,” where staff deliberately degrade and humiliate incarcerated people to strip them of their identities (Goffman 1961:23). Further research is needed to assess to what extent this verbal abuse exists within prisons today.

Lastly, medical abuse is a less obvious documented form of abuse within prisons (Young 2000; Aday, Farney, Wangmo et al. 2014; Tsai 2014). Some research shows that women’s perceptions of penal health care can be negative (Young 2000; Aday et al. 2014).

Aday and colleagues (2014) assessed how older incarcerated women perceived the health care system in southern prison facilities. The women’s accounts illustrated harmful practices such as delaying or even denying medical treatment. Furthermore, the accounts demonstrated that

occasional staff indifference to incarcerated women was commonplace in these facilities. Young (2000) found that many of the women she interviewed held both negative and positive views about the medical care they received. However, she determined that women's views of health care in prison were predominantly negative and that nearly all the women interviewed reported inadequate care (Young 2000). Each interviewee reported apathetic treatment from the staff as well, as if they were not deserving of care (Young 2000).

Such reports of apathetic and inadequate care from medical staff fall in line with Goffman's interpretation of prisons as an institution of social control. Goffman (1961) described how there are total institutions of care, such as homes for the elderly, orphanages, and mental hospitals. On the other hand, there are institutions of control, such as prisons and jails, where the main goal is not to provide care but to provide social control. Goffman (1961:4–5) wrote that institutions of control are “organized to protect the community against what are felt to be intentional dangers to it, with the welfare of the persons thus sequestered not the immediate issue.” So, in prisons, extreme care from the medical staff is not prioritized as prisons are not designed for care.

The literature revealed that abuse is commonly occurring in prisons and thus it illuminated current flaws in the system. Prisons are not as secure or rehabilitative as a structural-functionalist or a law enforcement enthusiast might suggest. Despite all the systems of control in prison, harm and abuse still occur. Some researchers briefly referenced the concept of intersectionality. The results demonstrated that people of different social categories experience different outcomes. Thus, an analysis of prison assault by race and sexual orientation is needed. The extant literature is crucial in that it focuses either solely on women or on women in comparison to men. Unfortunately, the studies on women's prison abuse similarly focused on

sexual abuse rather than other forms of abuse that demand attention. Potential abuses might include verbal abuse, psychological abuse, financial abuse, physical abuse, medical abuse, and more. Lastly, many of the studies are a bit older, and some are over a decade old. They are important in establishing a foundation for research, but it should be kept in mind they are not all the most up-to-date. More up-to-date research is needed to observe how assault continues in prisons 17 years after the passing of PREA. As previously established, Texas incarcerates more women than any other state (Kajstura 2018), and its large prison population and overcrowded conditions may lead to a higher risk of assault (Gaes and McGuire 1985; Lahm 2008). Thus, further research is needed to assess how various forms of abuse may play out in Texas prisons.

METHODS

Several researchers have assessed the conditions of prison life from incarcerated people through interviews (Blackburn, Mullings, and Marquart 2008; Jackson 2011; Michael Gibson-Light 2019). Due to the rich detail gleaned from qualitative interviews, I relied on this method to get a full, in-depth description of life in Texas prisons. This method, in addition to the specific topics in my interview guide, extends the extant literature by looking at forced labor, family separation, and abuse through qualitative interviews. The population for my project is adult Black women who had been formerly incarcerated in Texas. My approach is in line with Black feminist scholars' assertion that women of color demand special attention towards their social issues (Crenshaw 2012; Collins 2016). Furthermore, my decision to focus on the experiences of Black women comes from the "violence by other means theory," which highlights the ways that prisons historically and presently target Black Americans.

Recruitment

All study procedures were Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved. I used purposive sampling, a type of nonprobability method that relies on the researcher's judgment to choose participants based on their certain characteristics or qualities. In this way, I focused on the experiences of Black women who have been incarcerated. While I heavily relied on purposive sampling, I recruited one participant via referral. I recruited some women (n=5) as part of my Qualitative Methods course in spring 2021, while I recruited the rest of my interviewees (n=9) between the fall of 2021 and the winter of 2022. Overall, my sample included 14 formerly incarcerated Black women. My relatively small sample size of 14 is justifiable due to the time constraints of conducting original research and writing my master's thesis in one academic year. Toward the end of my interviews, I began to reach a saturation point where I started to hear similar responses, further justifying my small sample size. Nevertheless, others can build from my study to include larger sample sizes and gather a broader range of perspectives.

I relied on two methods for recruiting interviewees: Posting on Craigslist and reaching out to prison-related organizations. In each recruitment method, I introduced myself and my project using a formalized, uniform script. (See Appendix A.) I provided a brief overview of the types of questions that the women would be asked and explained what the research would be used for. Interviewees were screened based on their age, whether they were incarcerated in Texas, and whether they identify as Black, including biracial or multiracial women. University of Houston (UH) students, non-English speakers, and pregnant women were excluded from the study. In an effort to gain an intersectional analysis, I encouraged LGBTQ+ women to participate.

I recruited a modest number of interviewees through two prison-related organizations. Specifically, I emailed organizations that service currently and formerly incarcerated women and

introduced my project using the formalized script. Through this method, I was connected to four women whom I interviewed. One woman I met organically through a prison-related event. However, I recruited the majority of the interviewees through Craigslist. I posted the same script to the event gigs section of Craigslist. I deemed the event gigs section the best fit because many postings such as job fairs, studies, and one-time employment options are found in that section.

The use of Craigslist was intentional in that some formerly incarcerated use this website because they are discriminated against in the formal job market. I specifically posted in zip codes that have a high percentage of people who are registered offenders coming from that zip code (Texas Department of Corrections 2019). I might assume that these zip codes may have a large number of formerly incarcerated people as well. To reach my target population, I excluded zip codes where non-Black people are the majority and included zip codes where Black people are the majority (American Community Survey 2019). This approach was strategic, as some zip codes on the list are overwhelmingly White or Hispanic, and thus posting there would not as effectively reach my target population.

This approach was also cost-efficient considering each post cost between three to seven dollars depending on the area. I posted to zip codes that had the highest number of offenders and also contain a majority Black population, including 75216, 77016, 77033, and 75241. These zip codes represent the Dallas and Houston area. I also included zip codes that were on the top 30 list of having the largest number of offenders but contain a smaller percentage of Black people, such as 75702 in Tyler (36.2 percent Black) and 75460 in Paris (24.3 percent Black), and 77640 in Beaumont/Port Arthur (62 percent).

Interviews

I conducted interviews between the spring of 2021 and January 2022. The interviews were semi-structured with an interview guide assessing the details of life incarcerated, including a range of topics from labor, family separation, social dynamics, and medical care. My interview guide contained 12 main questions with various sub-questions and probes. (See Appendix B.) At the IRB's recommendation, I excluded questions regarding abuse, although such accounts still naturally arose in the interviews.

Before each interview, I discussed the study and the potential psychological risks that might arise. I asked for permission to start the recording, then I went through the major points of the consent form with the woman since I had obtained consent virtually through an electronic copy before the interview. (See Appendix C.) The five women I interviewed as part of my course project were electronically provided with a different consent form. (See Appendix D.) These five women were reconsented *ex post facto*. This is because UH's IRB does not require signed consent when research is conducted for pedagogical purposes. However, it does require reconsenting participants if data collected for pedagogical purposes are to be used for a master's thesis.

Before beginning the interview, I stressed the fact that women can choose not to answer any question they may find to be distressing and that we may stop at any time. I planned that during the interview if a woman brings up a distressing memory, I would cease asking questions on my list and hold space for the woman to express her feelings. However, this did not happen to be the case.

Next, I had the interviewee fill out a fact sheet containing their socio-demographic information. (See Appendix E.) This survey covered key information including age, race, birthplace, marital status, number of children, education, time spent incarcerated, occupation,

sexual orientation, and religion. I did not choose to include a question on gender identity, since all participants identified as women, as necessitated/required by the study inclusion criteria.

After the interview, I provided each woman with a list of free or low-cost counseling resources that she may use in case she experiences any lasting distress from the interview. (See Appendix F). I sent thirty dollars to each woman through online money applications to compensate for her time and emotional labor. This compensation was possible in part because my research was funded through the Blanche Espy Chenoweth Graduate Fellowship offered by the UH's Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department. Due to COVID and confidentiality concerns, six interviews occurred online via Zoom, and eight took place via telephone.

I prioritized and pushed for the use of Zoom, so that I may read each woman's body language, disposition, and physical characteristics. However, given that these women were separated from society for a sizable amount of time, and did not grow up with smartphones, some women struggled with technological use and or did not own a laptop or smartphone from which to use Zoom. While the best practice would have been to conduct all face-to-face interviews, COVID-19, geographic distance, and barriers to technological access all impacted this outcome. Interviews with each woman were conducted one time and lasted between thirty minutes to an hour. While I could not promise anonymity, I promised confidentiality by providing each woman with a pseudonym. I maintained an encrypted, password-protected document with the real name of the woman and their associated pseudonym which was deleted after transcription.

Data Analysis

I recorded my interviews using my iPhone or computer, then used Otter.ai to automatically generate a transcription of the interview. I went back and listened to the interviews and edited the transcript so that it was verbatim. Once my transcript was generated and edited, I deleted the audio recording of the respective interview. I used the computer program ATLAS.ti to code my interview data. In line with an inductive approach, I used Glaser and Strauss' (1967) system of grounded theory coding: I performed an initial open coding of my fourteen transcripts, seeking to code the data into as many categories as I saw fit. A small number of these initial codes were inspired by the literature. However, in line with grounded theory, the majority of these codes arose from the language of the interviewees themselves.

Throughout this process, I created memos based on observations and themes that I began to see naturally rise from the data. Because themes emerged as I was coding the interviews, I went back and coded a second time to ensure that all codes were applied sufficiently. Then, I performed focused coding by grouping my various codes into a smaller number of more focused, thematic groups.

Validity

I consider my positionality as a researcher and how that might affect the validity of my data collection, analysis, and interpretation. As a White person, there may have been some things that Black women may not feel as comfortable sharing with me as if I were also a Black woman. For instance, discussing race and interactions with white guards and incarcerated women might prove to be more difficult. Hammersly and Atkinson (1995) refer to this concept as “reflexivity;” in other words, how the researcher and the setting might influence the participant and their response. In interviews, reflexivity is a “powerful and inescapable influence” (Maxwell 2013:125). Some aspects, such as my race and class, I cannot control. However, I worked to

minimize the influence of reflexivity during my interviews by asking open-ended questions and avoiding leading questions, or questions that are structured so they might elicit a certain answer (Maxwell 2013).

Furthermore, I considered my potential bias against prisons and how I might control it each step of the way throughout the research process to decrease potential threats to validity. I did this by not communicating my bias or in-depth research motives to the interviewees. Furthermore, despite my ideological leanings, I did not pass judgment when women expressed either anti-prison or pro-prison sentiments. I ensured my interview guide is as neutral and open-ended as possible, and I encouraged women to discuss positive and negative perceptions of prison. Kvale (2007) describes communicative validation or getting feedback from the group you are studying about your findings. One form of communicative validation that can occur in interviews is called “member validation.” Through member validation, the interviewee becomes an integral part of the knowledge production process and can help validate or invalidate the researcher’s conclusions or assumptions. I performed “member checks” during the interview, which involved restating what I had heard from the speaker and confirming if my understanding and interpretation are accurate.

By gathering verbatim transcripts, I collected “rich data” that helped improve the credibility of my research (Maxwell 2013). To address the validity threat of researcher bias in the data analysis process, I analyzed and collected all data equally, rather than selecting the data that confirmed my research question. I also actively sought out evidence that could challenge my findings and consider “rival hypotheses” (Maxwell 2013). In addition to looking for opposing evidence, I looked for evidence of discrepancies within the data as well.

Interviewees’ Demographics

The ages of the fourteen interviewees ranged from 28 to 61, with an average age of 44.29 years. The majority of my interviewees were born in Texas (n=11), two were from Louisiana, and one woman was from Georgia. The majority of the interviewees were single (n=9), two lived with domestic partners, one was married, one was engaged, and one was divorced. All but one woman have children, with the number of children ranging from one to three. At the time of their incarceration, 12 of the 14 women were mothers. Half of the interviewees were unemployed (n=7). One woman worked part-time, one woman was self-employed, and five worked full-time in positions such as sales, management, and transportation. My sample exhibited social class variation, as evidenced by a range in women's education, from high school to college degrees, and occupational history, from those who are unemployed to those who take on leadership positions such as managerial and self-employed positions.

Over half of my interviewees identified as straight (n=9). Two interviewees identified as bisexual, one identified as lesbian, one woman had an unofficial "live-in wife" and identified as "part of the LGBT community," and one denied commenting. Although I did not ask about gender, one of my interviewees identified as a gender nonconforming woman, and one of my interviewees was a woman who, due to the nature of her biology, spent time in a men's prison. Of the interviewees, five identified as Christian, one was Baptist, one was Catholic, and three were non-denominational. One woman identified with no religion, and three women identified with no religion but indicated that they were "spiritual" or just a "believer." Women spent anywhere from 7 months to 19 years incarcerated. Figures 1 and 2 display the interviewees' self-reported race and education. 11 women identified as Black or African American, two identified as African American and Hispanic, and one woman was multiracial. This last woman was part Scottish, Indian, Dominican, and Mexican and cheekily identified as "Heinz 57." However,

because she also identified as “dark skin” and was assumed to be Black by others in prison, I decided it was fit to include her in my final sample. A complete table of interviewees and their socio-demographic information is included in Table 1.

Some women were on parole and some were off parole, depending on their charge and time spent since incarceration. However, I do not have a complete record of each woman’s offense. While I initially asked women about their charges, I noticed that this question often caused distress as women recalled their cases and, at times, sought to justify their actions. In order not to corrode trust between myself and the interviewees, and in order to not make any woman feel judged, I decided to stop asking about offenses.

Table 1. Key Socio-Demographic Information of Interviewees

Name	Age	Race	Birth Place	Marital Status	No. of Kids	Education	Time Spent	Occupation	Sexual Orientation	Religion
Alicia	39	Afr. Am. & Hisp.	Metairie, LA	Single	2	GED	7 mo.	Unemployed	Bisexual	Catholic
Chanel	49	Black	Houston, TX	Divorced	2	Some college	2.5 yr.	Unemployed	No comment	None; Spiritual
Faith	28	Afr. Am.	Houston, TX	Single	0	High school	3 yr. 6 mo.	Unemployed	Bisexual	Christian
Kandace	38	Afr. Am.	Houston, TX	Domestic Partner	3	9th grade	2 yr.	Unemployed	Straight	Baptist
Naomi	50	Multiracial	Houston, TX	Single	3	College	3 yr. 6 mo.	General Manager	Straight	Christian
Cari	38	Afr. Am.	Baldwin, LA	Single	1	Some college	2 yr.	Unemployed	Straight	None; Spiritual
Tina	53	Black	San Angelo, TX	Married	1	Bachelor	5 yr. 9 mo.	Self-Employed	Heterosexual	Believer
Saraya	61	Afr. Am.	Houston, TX	Domestic Partner	2	Some college	7 mo.	Unemployed	“LGBT”	Non-Denomination
Chanda	47	Black	Dallas, TX	Single	1	Associate	19 yr.	Transportation	Straight	Non-Denomination

Ty	37	Afr. Am. & Hisp.	Houston, TX	Single	2	High school	4 yr.	Sales	Straight	None
Amber	44	Afr. Am.	Temple, TX	Single	1	GED	2 yr. 8 mo.	Unemployed	Straight	Christian
Cece	53	Black	Houston, TX	Engaged	1	Some college	1 yr. 11 mo.	Customer Service	Lesbian	Non-Denomination
Ann	40	Afr. Am.	Houston, TX	Single	2	GED	1 yr. 1 mo.	Part-time	Straight	Christian
Latricia	43	Afr. Am.	Houston, TX	Single	1	High school	4 yr. 2 mo.	Manager	Straight	Christian

Figure 1.

Interviewees' Racial Identities

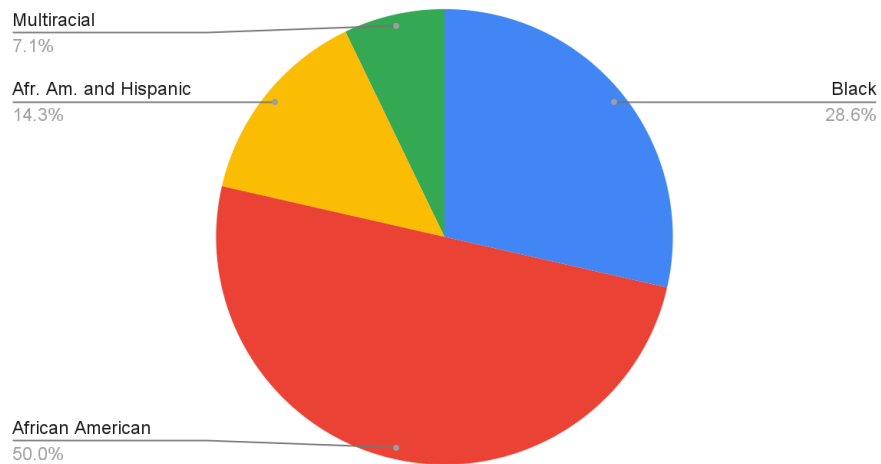
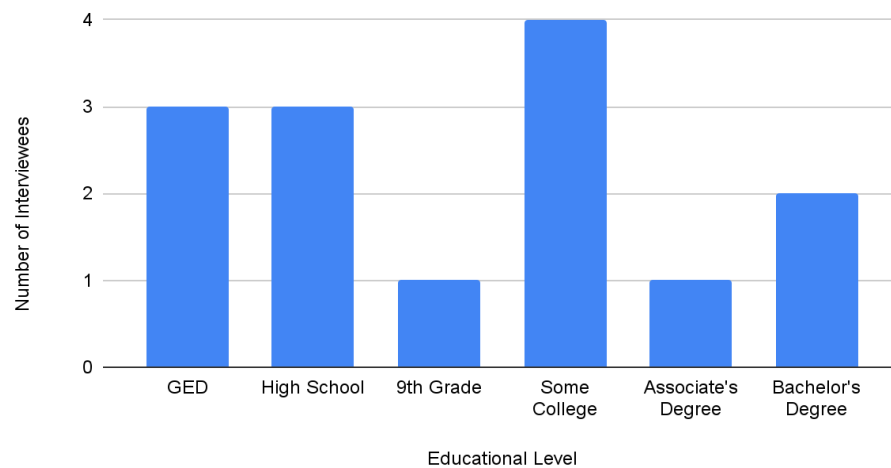


Figure 2.

Interviewees' Highest Level of Education



RESULTS

In line with my original research question, I found evidence for major family separation, some abuse, in the form of verbal, medical, and physical abuse, and forced labor. However, my data also revealed positive sentiments related to family support, positive treatment and interactions, and beneficial work outcomes. I will explore each of these sentiments to present a nuanced perspective on Black women's experiences in Texas prisons.

Family Separation

Many women endured seemingly difficult separation during their incarcerations. Twelve of the 14 women were mothers going into their incarceration. In some cases, women experienced near isolation from their families. In many cases, visits were either seldom or nonexistent. Ann, a 40-year-old woman with two children, said:

It was really hard because that's- I think that's one of the worst things about being locked up is you don't have any contact with the outside world. And I was- [Newbury] is like really far... It's like five hours away. There's no way anybody could come visit me, so I didn't have any- I never had any visitation or anything like that.

For Ann, the geographical distance between her unit and her family and friends was too great to bridge. This seemingly unsurmountable geographical distance, as I posited, may be part of the unique experience of living in such an expansive state as Texas. Getting a prison sentence might mean having to move hundreds of miles away from your family. Alicia, a 39-year-old from Louisiana with twin girls, echoed Ann's point. Alicia said:

We were too far away because [Hayes] is in a city called [redacted], and that is too far for them to go... She was busy with the kids... She really couldn't take them up there. So I had to spend the whole time without seeing the babies... It was awful. I just missed an entire chunk of time with my babies.

In Alicia's case, the distance, plus her mother's duties raising the children, deterred visits from happening. Aside from not being able to visit, Alicia mourned for the time she missed with her babies during that seven months. She told me, "I tried not to get in any fights. I tried not to do anything wrong. And I just wanted to get done and get back to my babies." The promise of being able to see her children again was motivation to stay out of trouble and get out. Chanel, who had two children herself, echoed this point, explaining, "They was so far so like my mama wouldn't come like- my mama was a single parent, like, she can't be coming."

Both Alicia and Chanel point to the difficulty of raising children, especially on one's own, and how that duty might deter reaching out to family members in prison. Chanel also expressed a sentiment similar to Alicia's, telling me, "I had a daughter, so I missed out on all of it. That stuff I can't get back." Both Alicia and Chanel were saddened by missing valuable, irreplaceable time with their children. Cari, a single woman from Louisiana, said, "I didn't receive any in-person visit, due to the location and their work schedule, and then of course COVID." For two years, Cari was unable to see her daughter. In these cases, visiting was unfeasible due to a combination of time constraints and overall responsibilities. While these

women did not explicitly state the effects of incarceration on their relationships with their children, it is clear that they lamented the lost time.

38-year-old Kandace also went through her entire two years of incarceration without seeing her children, and she uniquely noted its impact on her family. She said, “it impacted my daughter because she missed me a lot you know?” Speaking of her daughter’s father, Kandace mentioned “he never brought her and sent no card or nothing because he don't read and write you know, so that's what he said, that was his excuse.” In this case, Kandace was powerless to see her family; it is simply out of the incarcerated person’s control. The result of such isolation was painful at best, but in some cases, the outcome became completely severed relationships. 28-year-old Faith spoke, “It really hurt my relationship because I didn't see any of my family at the time. And it really- it really hurt. And a lot of relationships cut off things like that.” This kind of loss of closeness in many cases sounded traumatic for women, and again, out of their control. It is worth noting that attention has been drawn to the “racial violence” of family separation, and how the United States has often held “historical practices of separating non-white families, such as indigenous Americans, slaves, and interned Japanese-Americans” (Nayak 2018). In this way, I might briefly draw a connection to the “violence by other means” theory, in which the state continues to break up disadvantaged families of color through different mechanisms.

Cost of communication. In addition to in-person visiting issues, some women also experienced limited virtual communication due to financial reasons. The high cost of communication was an often-cited difficulty in regularly getting in touch with family members. Kandace shared, “My mom, they accepted like a couple of my calls. But they know they couldn't accept no more then because it's very expensive in there.” In Kandace’s case, her family allowed for limited contact, but her family had to be mindful of how many calls they accepted out of fear

of a large phone bill since the families on the outside are the ones paying the phone bill based on minutes. Many women considered this financial cost and tried to limit the number of calls they sent out to make it easier for their families. For instance, 61-year-old Saraya said:

I respected that people have bills, my family had bills. And things had to go on out here. So I didn't want to add any extra fees to them any extra bills more than I had to... Just when I got depressed and I would make a phone call real quick. And that was it.

Saraya was indigent during her seven months inside prison, meaning she received no funds from her family during her incarceration. In this way, Saraya's resources, possibly tied to the social class and resources of her family, influenced the way she navigated communication. She would only rely on a costly phone call in the direst of depressive situations. Evidently, steady communication was out of the question for some women, and if communication did occur via telephone, it was rare and only when deemed necessary. The cost of phone communication has gone down in recent years, from 26 cents in 2018 to 6 cents a minute currently (McGaughy 2018). Although this current rate is relatively more affordable, three separate hour-long phone calls each week would add up to \$43.20 a month, an extra bill some families just cannot support. Furthermore, many women spoke from their experience being incarcerated prior to 2018, when this theoretical monthly bill would have been \$187.20. For this reason, many women tried to keep their phone calls short and infrequent.

In some instances, the high cost of communication deterred women from talking on the phone altogether. Talking about phone calls, Ann, a 40-year-old woman who spent a little over a year in prison, said, "No. No, I couldn't. I couldn't talk to- I couldn't talk to anybody *laughs*. They're like really expensive." From her account, it was unclear if this decision was made by Ann or her family. Chanel similarly mentioned that she "didn't really run up [her] mama's phone bill," which implied that she was conscientious of the cost. Amber, a 44-year-old who spent two

years and eight months in prison, argued that she didn't really receive phone calls because "it's too expensive to actually call;" however, she said that receiving letters was "okay." While letters are a solid form of communication, they miss the element of hearing your loved one's voice and catching up in live time. These cases provide limited evidence that the degree of family separation can be influenced by one's resources, often tied to social class. Depending on the perceived financial situation of one's family, women often felt unable to utilize the phones provided to stay in touch.

Family Support

On the other hand, some women emphasized not the distance, but the closeness and support they received from their family during their incarceration. While the distance deterred some families from visiting, some women reported that their families drove anywhere from an hour to four hours to visit. When asked how her incarceration impacted her relationship with her family, Cece, a white-collar worker with one child, shared, "They was still there for me 100 percent the entire time, came to visit, so it actually really didn't impact my relationship with them at all." From Cece's perspective, she did not feel the effects of being separated from her family to the same extent as the other women, since she was able to regularly receive visits. Latricia, who spent four years and two months in prison, also reported that her "mom kept in contact" and she received "phone calls, letters, and visits" despite her family being located "like two hours" away. Latricia also reported that the phone calls "cost a lot of money," but it did not seem to deter their communication, which again points to a potential resource and class-related aspect to outcomes of family communication. Naomi, a multiracial woman with three children, also experienced an abundance of support, sharing:

My mother was always there. She came to see me every two weeks. I talked to her on the phone every other day, and she wrote me letters and stuff, you know, she did a lot of

encouraging things... So, uh, my mother, my aunt and my kids were always there in my corner. Even my fiancé at the time, he, you know, he was there... I was one of those that was lucky to have the type of support that I did.

In Cece's and Naomi's cases, family members supported and encouraged them during their incarceration. However, Naomi's final comment about being one of the lucky ones reveals that her situation might not have been as common as we might think. In terms of romantic partnerships, Naomi received support from her fiancé until they later broke up after her incarceration. Similarly, Saraya discussed the support she received from her wife through phone calls, and Ann talked about how happy she was to receive a photo from her boyfriend. Surprisingly, these accounts of having a relationship while incarcerated indicate that the relationships were not damaged but endured.

Amber was another woman who was able to receive visits. She shared, "Yes, [my mom] would bring my son. Because, you know, we really didn't want him in that environment. But I couldn't live without it at the same time, and he wanted to go." Despite some initial visiting concerns, Amber and her son were able to see each other, only because her mom ultimately agreed. Alicia was one woman who did not receive visits; however, she still managed to feel supported:

My mom would, she would put money on my books and she stayed in contact with me the whole time. She would send me pictures of the kids. And she would give me support she would spend- she would give me emotional support, which really helped a lot.

Although Alicia expressed that she dearly missed her kids, she still felt close to her mom and kids without having visits. The financial and emotional support seemed to supplant the time she could not see her family. In Alicia's case, her children were only babies at the time of her incarceration, so it was up to her mother whether or not she could see them. Conversely, Tina's son was fourteen when she was incarcerated, and once he turned seventeen "he was able to come

on his own” without a chaperone. In this way, one’s ability to see their child can be shaped by the age of their child relative to the visitation rules that are in place. In sum, despite the physical barriers imposed by incarceration, many women were still able to receive support and comfort from their families during this trying time.

Commissary. At times, this family support translated to material benefits. Four of my interviewees were indigent during their incarceration. Being indigent means no one on the outside is putting money on your books, so you cannot go to the commissary or the general store in prison. Therefore, women who were not provided with their family’s money had to suffer in small ways. Saraya said she could not go to the commissary so she “ate the slop” from the chow hall. This assessment of the free food was not uncommon, given that half of the women mentioned that they would change the quality and/or quantity of food if they had the power.

On the other hand, women whose families provided them with commissary had an improved quality of life. Amber told me, “my mom was putting money on my books... she couldn't do it every time. But she would try to do it, you know, whenever she could... that's so important.” Tina, who spent a total of 5 years and 9 months in prison, further elaborated on the importance of commissary. She told me, “the food in the chow hall was terrible. Terrible. So that's what I basically lived off of was the commissary.” This luxury of living off food in the commissary is a huge privilege. Speaking of the commissary, Ann said, “Your only joy over there is the commissary.” In an institution where your autonomy is significantly reduced and your options are limited, having the agency that comes along with purchasing power was deemed crucial. Through the commissary, one can attain food items such as instant milk, ramen, mackerel, chili, chips, and condiments. Furthermore, one can buy hygiene items that are not provided such as deodorant, or hygiene items that are limited such as toothpaste and toilet paper.

One may also purchase a small radio and battery-operated fan to combat the heat inside Texas units that lack air conditioning. Such items that seem common in the free world are highly sought after inside prison walls. These perspectives on commissary provide some evidence that family support through financial aid was extremely beneficial for some women, which provides some further evidence that relative social class or resources of oneself and one's family can impact their outcomes in prison.

Labor Outcomes

Assigned menial labor. All but one woman in my sample, who had a physical disability, worked while they were in prison. According to Kandace, you receive your job when you enter the prison. She said, "Oh, when you go there, they assign you a job, you got to work." When a person first enters the Texas prison system, they are "admitted to a designated TDCJ intake center" where they go through an identification process, several health examinations, and "various tests are administered to detect medical or mental health problems and to determine educational and intelligence levels" (TDCJ 2016). Imprisoned people are interviewed on subjects ranging from their family structure and criminal history to their educational and occupational history (TDCJ 2016).

This information is used to determine various outcomes, such as which unit the person will be sent to and which job assignment they will receive. In this way, the intake process is crucial in determining job outcomes (TDCJ 2016). Alicia spoke of this intake process in relation to work assignments. She said, "They give you a little interview to see what your job—what your past history is, and maybe your schooling—but I think it also helps if the girls, whoever works, does the intake, I think they might have something to do with it. I don't know I'm not sure what they, how they do it." Here, Alicia extends on the information provided by TDCJ to supply some

insight that who you know, or maybe how you are perceived by the women working in intake, could potentially affect your work outcomes.

In most cases, the work assignment was not optional, which indicates a level of coercion; however, the forced nature was not emphasized in these interviews. For example, speaking of her work assignment, Latricia said, “It was just basically assigned to me once I got there... I’d have to work every day.” While her word choice indicates a certain level of coercion, Latricia, like many women, spoke of this assigned labor matter-of-factly, rather than complaining about or emphasizing the forced nature of the assignment. However, most women did speak of menial, somewhat degrading work to which they were begrudgingly assigned. In the words of Ann, “What you do in there is pretty menial. It didn’t do anything for me. Left a bad taste in my mouth.” These menial jobs ranged from kitchen jobs, to work in the laundry room, and general cleaning services. Alicia shared, “They had me doing toilets. Toilets and mopping the hallways... It’s just whatever they assign to you. You just have to take whatever you get.” Alicia’s comment implies she did not feel there was much choice or say in her assignment, which also points to an element of coercion in the labor outcome.

Amber described her working conditions in the kitchen as “completely awful... it’s hot, sweaty, and just awful... you’re in the kitchen every day, you do the same thing every single day, and it’s awful.” Amber resented the overall monotony and general harsh environment of the kitchen job she worked. Chanda, a 47-year-old woman, was incarcerated for 19 years; accordingly, she worked many different jobs. In addition to working in the kitchen and laundry room, Chanda worked a job at a pig farm across the road from her unit. She said “they would do all the really gross stuff before. They would like process it and then ship it to us frozen. And, so I would like have to cut it up... We worked a bandsaw, we had a grinder, we had a slicer.” When I

asked about how Chanda received her jobs, she went on to say, “Normally they assign it to you. There are some jobs that you can request or whatever, but it’s according to your behavior.” Similarly, speaking of jobs, Naomi told me, “Some is based on how you’re classified. I was classified as, uh, a low priority offender... So I got to move around the facilities, unlike other people.” Chanda’s and Naomi’s comments imply a hierarchy of jobs. This job hierarchy, depending on one’s behavior, classification, and potentially one’s work background, was a key theme that will be explored more in looking at the most dreaded and the most revered jobs that other women worked.

Hoe squad. The worst job reported by all women was called “the hoe squad,” which is a jarring example of prison labor that warrants complete detail. Ann gave a very detailed description of the hoe squad:

I got put on something called a hoe squad. And they make you go outside and, you know, do yard work and things like that. And the guards are just horrible to you when you're out there... it was the worst two months of my life over there... they don't give you a lot of water when you're out there. Very, very hot... They just make you stay in this really tight line... And they have you in this one area of the field, you know, whichever area that you're working on that day... there's guards all over the place with guns.

The way that Ann describes the hoe squad, where imprisoned people labor in a tight line under the supervision of armed guards, harkens back to the penal practice of chain gangs; the conditions are tough to the point of being arguably unethical. Later on, Ann added some more details about how they would work for “about six hours” and guards would “yell and scream at you.... if you weren't doing exactly what they wanted or they thought you were moving too slow.” Not only would you be yelled at, but Ann shared, “People would fall out, they would pass out because they're too hot, you know, it would get dehydrated and pass out. And they just left you there.” The working conditions of the hoe squad are harsh and physically taxing.

Unsurprisingly, women dreaded this outdoor, grueling agricultural work, and it was the

last job any woman wanted to do. Alicia shared, “I guess most people got something called the hoe squad. And that was like really big. And you just pray that you didn't get that. Luckily I didn't. I would have rather been scrubbing toilets than doing hoe squad.” This quotation provides insight into a perceived hierarchy of jobs inside of prison, where the hoe squad is at the very bottom. Tina, who is currently self-employed with a bachelor's degree, was the only woman I interviewed who was able to work her way into a highly sought-after paid job. This industry job was uniquely offered by the unit, Fleming, which is privately operated but contracted by TDCJ. However, she had to start from the bottom. She shared:

When I first went in, I got put on hoe squad. And when I got put on the hoe squad, it was ridiculously terrible. Like, it would be real hot.... or you got to go out there breaking down rocks, or it could be real cold. And you would be like "Oh Lord." So I remember one time... carrots had came in and we had to go and pick the carrot. You better not eat those carrots. No nothing from the gardener or that's a case... I said, "Please, Lord, my charge wasn't this bad. I can't take it." The hoe squad was terrible.

From what I gathered in the interviews, food collected during the hoe squad was used in the chow hall to eat. However, according to Tina, the prisons are state-run, and “they're for profit.” She told me, “Most of that stuff too they were selling off because you can see the mesh bags with the state or whatever, whatever on there and the unit and they sell it in grocery stores and stuff like that.”

The connection between the hoe squad and prison profits is unsurprising. Though unmentioned in these interviews, other formerly incarcerated people have drawn parallels between the hoe squad and slavery (Happy StompingBear 2020; Daniele Selby 2021). From my interview data, I gathered that women work in fields inside the prison fences, sometimes being bused out to alternative locations, to engage in grueling work for no pay while surrounded by armed guards. This parallel points to the “violence by other means” theory, where Texas has continued the process of forced, unpaid labor through prisons instead of plantations. The Texas

Corrections Industries, established in 1963 as part of TDCJ, legally allows for Texas' incarcerated workers to produce a variety of items ranging from textiles, janitorial supplies, furniture, and steel products that are then sold to local and federal agencies, schools, and hospitals (Texas Correctional Industries 2018). As one potential work outcome, the hoe squad provides an example of the grueling, mandatory work that is often imposed on women incarcerated in Texas prisons.

Good jobs. As previously mentioned, many women described a loose hierarchy of jobs, where certain jobs were seen as better or worse than others. While most women reported being assigned menial work, some women were rewarded with higher positions that they even enjoyed; however, these jobs were not simply handed to them. Ann, who originally was put on the hoe squad, was able to later qualify for a seemingly better job. She shared, "Well, they put me in the mailroom because I had gotten my GED. I was going to like a business school, where they- that's when they wanted to use me for the mailroom. That's what they told me." Because of Ann's higher education and burgeoning background in business, she was recognized as a good fit for a more bureaucratic and less labor-intensive position in the mailroom.

Cece, a woman with some college education and a background in office work, shared with me, "I actually was assigned to the kitchen there... I was assigned as one of the servers to serve the food on the tray, and then when I was talking to the latest overhead, I was like 'This is not, you know, I'm an office person.' So then she put me in the office." Cece's example may make it seem simple to switch work assignments. However, as a woman who came from a white-collar background, working at a "government entity" prior to incarceration, she had certain social capital and skills that granted her legitimacy for that position. Tina, whose prison work history I will discuss more at length, had a Bachelor's in Business Administration and was able to work

her way up to a paying industry job. These women's examples provide support for Gibson-Light's (2019) observation that social capital can help one's job outcomes in prison. However, here, the social capital came not from Cece's, Ann's, and Tina's race but their occupational and educational background.

However, I also found very limited evidence to support Gibson-Light's (2019) observation between social status, race, and job outcome. Tina, the woman with a Business Administration background, told me at one unit she was housed in Central Texas, she was "the first Black female to work in the commissary." She told me the entire story, including how other women at the unit assumed she would simply be doing janitorial work in the commissary because it was unheard of for a nonwhite person to have such an esteemed job. The other women's assumptions that Tina would work in a janitorial position also suggest there is a racialized aspect to custodial labor in prison. When she got to her job, she said, "the workers that were there, they were white workers, and they looked like, I think they knew that that change was coming." This "change" she refers to is the end to racial gatekeeping of certain jobs. However, she said her coworkers said that she was "not... ghetto," which possibly helped her get along with her white co-workers. This sentiment points to a general anti-black, classist attitude, but also shows how certain employment opportunities may be racialized. Aside from Tina's example from the commissary, I did not explicitly ask about characteristics, such as the race, of their coworkers; therefore, I did not ascertain any other instances of occupational segregation by race.

Later on in her incarceration. Tina was referred for a selective industry job as a drill facilitator that she greatly enjoyed. The way by which she attained her job was notable. As previously stated, Alicia commented on work assignments possibly being influenced by

whatever ladies worked intake that day. Her comment implied there may be some bias in work assignments, or that the work assignment process is not as objective as TDCJ states. This insight was also reflected in one of Tina's comments. When I asked Tina how she got her job working in the industry, she said:

You got to know somebody to know somebody... There was a dorm that was nothing but industry workers that was in that dorm... because they were like the high echelon of [Fleming]. So I ended up in that dorm as the SSI because you know, they have to have someone because we had washing machines and dryers there... And so I was a wash operator. And so one of the girls came and they were handing me their bag, and they say, 'You know what, Lisa? You probably do good working at the industry. You get paid...' and I'm like, 'Yeah,' someone put in a word and see if I can get you hired. And that's how I got hired.

Tina's comment implies that there can maybe be some favoritism at play in the work assignment process. Tina's proximity to high-achieving women in Fleming led to a woman putting in a good word for her, which in turn enabled her upward mobility. Here, it was not Tina's employment or educational background that helped her out, but her social connections.

With this industry job, Tina was able to make about "\$1.50" more than the minimum wage, and she was able to save some of the money at a local bank and send some home to her son. However, Tina was the only woman in my sample to ever receive payment for her work inside prison. Tina even recognized how fortunate she was, saying, "that's the big issue about state prisons, especially in Texas, is that everything is like for profit, but so you working for free, you don't get paid. Unless you work in industry or something like that." In sum, while some good jobs exist in Texas prisons, the results from my interviews indicate that these are few and far between. In Tina's case, social connections seemed to play a part in work assignments. In general, these positions seemed to be reserved for women with greater education and occupational prestige, which points to a potential connection between work outcomes and social class. As Tina says, more often than not, people incarcerated in Texas are not getting paid. This

normative system where imprisoned people in Texas work for no pay might be argued as slavery by definition. In line with the “violence by other means” theory, the 13th amendment loophole that Texas adheres to allows for the exploitation of a disadvantaged group in order to save money and prisons, and at times, generate a profit.

One thing that seemed to make these “good jobs” more valuable to women was a greater degree of autonomy. A job such as the hoe squad involved a lot of direct oversight from the guards; conversely, other jobs allowed for less supervision and greater relative freedom. Ann told me she enjoyed working in the mailroom. She said, “that was really nice because... I was in there by myself all day... It was 100% better than that hoe squad.” Similarly, Naomi told me, “I was the head of peer education... I was even given a badge to show that I was, you know, one of the ones that was able to get out whenever need be.” Because of Naomi’s relatively high-status job in prison, she was able to move around the unit more than some other women. Speaking of her industry job, Tina told me:

I loved it over there. Because you walk down this little shoot. And it's like you're going to work. It's the actual- like it's work, work... So you're like going into a work career. And it's spread out. And so you're just in there working like you're at work. It totally takes you away from ‘Hey, I'm in prison.’

According to Tina, being able to walk away from the main building of the prison and go into a separate facility for work was very enjoyable. This relative autonomy even allowed her to momentarily disengage from the mentality of being incarcerated. While these “good jobs” were arguably more dignified than scrubbing toilets, per se, the relative degree of autonomy seemed to be most valued. However, it is worth noting that in Ann’s job at the mailroom, she said the one guard she worked with “was terrible.” Even Naomi mentioned that some guards who “didn’t like dark skin” women would still give her trouble about being let out of her cell for work, stating that the “lighter peer educators” got more relative freedom. Ann’s and Naomi’s comments reveal

that even these “better jobs” are still far from perfect and are also susceptible to unfavorable conditions.

Abuse and Maltreatment

Verbal abuse. Verbal abuse was the most commonly reported form of abuse or general maltreatment. Women often cited guards as the main perpetrators of verbal abuse, except for a few instances from medical staff and rarely other incarcerated women. Speaking of the guards, Ann told me, “They verbally abuse you all the time. They call you inmate... they used to call us all sorts of stuff... they just pick on- they nitpick on anything they can.” To Ann, being called “inmate” rather than her name felt derogatory. Echoing Ann’s point, Naomi recalled her kitchen supervisor “curs[ing]” her out regularly. However, in Naomi’s case, she spoke ill of one guard in particular rather than a group. When asked about her interactions with the guards, Kandace said that they treated her “rough, bad, like shit,” and went on to say that some guards will “cuss you out... treat you like, you know, you ain’t nothing.” Ann, Naomi, and Kandace similarly felt disrespected by the guards’ words and attitudes.

Saraya elaborated on the roughness and disrespect, stating the guards at her unit “loved to shout. Love. They just couldn’t say something decent voiced. It was always degrading or yelling or screaming. Shouting at the tougher ones. They would like the big machos.” This comment hints that “the big machos” or the more butch women might be vulnerable to greater scrutiny and rough treatment by guards. This example provides very limited evidence of how one’s gender expression (i.e., masculine) or intersecting gender and sexual orientation (i.e., butch lesbian or stud) might shape their experience in prison. I tried to assess the impact of sexual orientation through one sub-question in my interview guide. Ann and Tina, two straight women, discussed a rampant hook-up culture. Tina referred to some “problems” between women who were “actually

gay from the world” and women who were “gay for the stay.” Although these accounts are not offered firsthand by queer women, they do provide limited evidence that the infrastructure of prison might influence a sort of “situational homosexuality” (Escoffier 2003). However, I did not gather any first-hand evidence of sexual orientation directly influencing prison outcomes, so this concept necessitates further insight.

Alicia provided further insight into how she felt she was treated by the guards. In her opinion, guards would shame and even degrade the other women:

The guards are really bad, they're very degrading, they don't like you... they will tell you that on a daily basis and let you know that they hate you. And they think that you're never gonna amount to anything... And they just basically call you a piece of trash for being there in the first place, and everything is your fault. And they try to just make you feel as bad as possible... they're horrible people.

This reported verbal abuse goes beyond cuss words and seems like a concerted shaming mechanism. Alicia argued that in prison, it is not just a couple of bad apples, but “the whole bunch,” with a “few good apples in there.” She describes an overall culture where, in her opinion, guards are allowed to treat people in prison poorly.

However, in line with the idea that overall experience varied unit by unit, Cari claimed that guards were way more “respectful” and that she was “treated really well” at Fleming Unit. Cari, who identifies as a spiritual person, said, “Now, at [Fleming], there's a lot of Christian guards. So, we came across a lot of good people... You know, everywhere we go there are some bad apples. You just have to know how to deal with it, but overall, the guards were very nice.” However, she continued to say that “Now I went to [Hayes], it's completely different... they were ruthless, and we were called names and it was just not a good experience.” In Cari's opinion, the quality of guards was not across the board. She shared one isolated event:

I was called on one occasion, a stupid ass bitch... Yeah, by the kitchen staff, she told you to “walk out in the kitchen, all y'all stupid ass bitches”... It was a lot of, “Come here hoe,

come here bitch. Don't talk to me like that, hoe"... 98 percent of these women have dealt with some sort of trauma. Why would you verbally abuse like that?

Cari makes a good point that verbal abuse only hurts women who, in many cases, have been let down by society and abused in the past (Blackburn and colleagues 2008). To address this issue of verbal abuse, Ann came up with an idea for a change in prison where prison officials "review the hiring process... to find a way to weed out some of those people" who treat incarcerated people poorly.

Threats were a less commonly reported form of verbal abuse. Cari told me that guards "would threaten to write a case, and they knew that disciplinary cases would affect your chances of making parole." Chanda echoed this point and told me it was common for guards to write false cases against people to "mak[e] us realize who's in charge." Overall, the large majority of the verbal abuse came from guards. However, Naomi commented on some racially-motivated verbal threats stemming from other women in prison. For instance, Naomi said, "You did have people that did not like Black people... And there was conflicts, you know, when it went to housing everybody, and you got someone that didn't like you because of the color of your skin." When I asked for an example, she told me about her close friend who "had a white roommate and she would make these comments about how she was gonna cut her in her sleep and all this other kind of stuff." While these threats never reportedly culminated into violence, such verbal racially motivated threats should be classified as verbal abuse. While this observation did stand-alone, I thought it was worth mentioning, especially when so many other women mentioned race-based cliques, and two women specifically referenced Aryan Brotherhood-affiliated women.

Along the same lines, Ty, a biracial gender-nonconforming woman, observed discrimination and racial slurs, stating, "I saw women who I would say were not white who got

picked on and targeted. I was kind of surprised I heard the N-word quite a bit... As well as a negative derogatory term for Hispanic..." Ty's observation did not stand alone. Speaking of other incarcerated women, Naomi said, "You did have people that did not like Black people." She added that even some guards at her unit "didn't like dark skin." Unsurprisingly, there seems to be evidence of an undercurrent of antiblackness tied to verbal abuse inside prisons. While knowing the racial composition of these units would have provided some more insight, this information cannot be easily located. This is most likely due to the influx and outflow of people from the prison, as people are booked into, processed out of, and transferred to different units throughout the year. Regardless, it should be noted that "exposure to racial discrimination should be considered as a form of violence," and comprises its own form of abuse (Sanders-Phillips 2009). From these women's accounts, it is clear that in prison, one might be subject to verbal abuse, whether it is because of being an incarcerated person or also a Black woman specifically.

Medical abuse and neglect. Some women reported that their treatment by the medical staff was fair or decent; these positive sentiments will be discussed at length in their own section. However, I received a startling number of accounts from women claiming to have experienced some serious medical maltreatment. While medical abuse could be included as a form of physical abuse, the frequency with which women reported medical grievances warrants its own discussion. Chanda concisely described her treatment by the medical staff, stating "some of the doctors and stuff they- I mean, you know, we're not people to them." She claims that she and the rest of the women were treated as "second class." Unsurprisingly, Chanda's sentiment of being treated as inferior echoes what many women described in their discussion of verbal abuse from guards.

Oftentimes, medical abuse manifested itself as neglect. Tina was asked if she had ever been diagnosed with a heart murmur after the medical unit performed an EKG; however, they brushed it aside and said it was “nothing.” She said, “that's something that, you know, I had to be treated for. And they knew that.” However, she argues that “if they see that you're nearing going home and some issues arise,” you will not be successful in trying to get care. This neglect was also reported by Ann, who spoke from her experience of getting regular seizures. Ann said:

I had a seizure in Harris County... you fall on the concrete, just, you know, go through it... They'll just leave you there flopping around on the floor. The guards do not care, they could care less. I mean, they'll just sit there and while you're having whatever episode you're having on the floor, they just sit there and talk about their plans for the night or whatever.

Anne followed up by saying that sometimes other women would try to get help, or “the guards would call a nurse, whenever they felt like it,” but “they were extremely slow to act on anything at all. They did not care. There is no medical treatment over there.” When Ann did receive medical attention for her seizures, she said “they didn't really do anything. But you know, they just kinda ask me what happened and I think they gave me an aspirin.” Furthermore, the time it took for ladies to see a doctor was concerning. Ann said you may have to “suffer for a good three days” before seeing a doctor. Alicia agreed on “an average of three” days waiting period, and most women reported a couple or several days waiting period. However, Chanel reported waiting a whole week, and Tina reported waiting even two or three weeks before being seen.

Accordingly, when asked what she would change about prison, Ann recommended that Texas prisons find a way to “make getting medical care a little easier.” Clearly, many women experienced medical mistreatment, specifically neglect, through lacking or delayed care.

While some experiences seemed like instances of medical neglect, some instances revealed that when medical attention did occur, it was very poor quality, arguably maltreatment.

When asked about the medical unit, Tina pulled from a technically different field of dental care:

I went and had my teeth cleaned and they did under the gum... I had to go back to the second part, and I would try to refuse it. And they were like, "Why?" and I said, "Because you guys didn't numb me... it felt like you raped my teeth," I told them. They let me leave out of there with blood all like it's horrible. Horrible.

Tina felt violated and pained from her interaction with the dentist. Although dental care and medical care are separate entities, Tina drew on this dental story to illustrate her subpar interactions with healthcare in general. Another instance of inadequate medical attention was supplied by Naomi:

I ended up going to [redacted] to the hospital... They were going to put a pacemaker in, which they didn't, they just put in a monitor... when I came back... there was not, "Ok well, let me check on you," or "We gon put you in an infirmary" or whatever. It was nothing like that... I ended up with a second-degree burn on my chest because I find out that I'm allergic to some of the tape they had put on me.

When I asked more about her poor treatment, Naomi told me that the medical unit she traveled to is "pretty much designated for the men because the men are housed there as well, so they took preferential treatment over the men than the women." This perceived injustice and inequality between men's and women's treatment, and the resulting inferior quality, may provide one reason for so many reports of poor medical attention and abuse. However, just as Fleming was previously described as an overall more respectful environment, Cari explains how treatment varied by unit. Cari said that the nurse practitioner at Fleming "was awesome" and "very informative... caring.... She did her best to get the best treatment that we could get at [Fleming]." However, Cari shared a more negative experience at another unit:

[Hayes] State, um, I went in for my pap smear and the lady rushed and she shoved the diaphragm in me... Very horrible... And then you repeatedly yell at me because I failed

to mention a- a previous health condition. You just shove a diaphragm in me *laughs in disbelief* like kind of traumatized.

Cari's account sounds very similar to Tina's dental experience, where they felt violated in response to the healthcare that they received in prison. In sum, many women suffered from an array of medical abuse, from medical neglect to medical maltreatment. Some women had limited experiences with the medical staff and therefore had little to tell, while some women reported extremely positive recollections about the medical unit. These viewpoints will be explored further in a subsequent section. However, it seemed that the women with more complicated medical issues had the most complaints about the care they received.

Physical and sexual abuse. Although physical abuse was mentioned less than the previously discussed forms of abuse, verbal and medical, four interviewees reported a few instances of physical abuse. When asked about gang presence, women typically stated that there was not a whole lot of gang presence in the unit. However, some women did cite the Aryan Brotherhood as one gang represented in prison. Alicia told me, "Of course, you know, there's some like Aryan [Brotherhood] people that were there, and they were strictly by themselves... A lot of white people would stick together." When I asked if these Aryan Brotherhood members would start fights, Alicia said, "it just depended on how frisky they're like, if they were in a bad mood and you were in their way, you better watch out because they just might, they would just hit people sometimes." She went on to provide more details, stating, "they would find a weak person and they would jump on them and they would you know, beat them up, and that did happen a lot. I did see that." This kind of physical assault was less common; however, one other woman witnessed physical abuse, and one experienced it as well.

Although Chanel did not report experiencing abuse herself, she witnessed her close friend get "beat... unconscious" with "a can of mackerel in a sock" by a bunch of women in front of the

guards. She claimed that guards are “not supposed to put they hands on” the women to intervene in fights, so they end up letting the fights happen at times. It seemed the general practice for guards was to film the altercation and call in for backup instead.

Similarly, Faith told me that she got in “a couple of fights,” stating, “I fought a guard... some girl told lies about me and she said something about me and one girl tried to stab me, well, she did stab me.” Faith was the only woman who reported such a drastic escalation of violence. A few other women reported being in one or two small fights or tiffs. Ann told me, “Yeah, I did. I did get in a couple of like little fights and things like that.” Amber also mentioned that she tried to avoid trouble, but she “did get in a couple altercations.” It is worth noting that the three women who reported having been in fights all have similar educational levels. Faith completed high school and Amber and Ann both have their GED. These cases seem to provide some very limited evidence that reported abuse may vary by educational background, which is a primary element of social class. However, the three other women with a high school diploma or GED did not report getting in fights.

In addition to physical abuse, Faith was the only woman in the sample who expressed that she had experienced overt sexual assault in the form of rape. When I asked about her interactions with her bunkie, Faith told me, “My bunkie was the one that actually raped me.” Sadly, this event was not isolated, with Faith following up by saying, “I was taken over a couple of times because I’m not that big or anything, and a lot of girls tried to have their way with me.” Faith provided a haunting anecdote of things “you couldn’t even imagine” from prison, but it is important to note that, due to her anatomy, she was housed in an all-male unit, which might have impacted her outcomes differently from the other women. As a bisexual woman, it is possible that her sexual orientation could have placed her at greater risk for sexual abuse, in line with past

literature (Alarid 2000). However, another woman, Naomi, reported some sexual harassment. She recalled getting “cat-called” by men when she traveled to a men’s facility for medical attention, and she mentioned them “doing things they’re not supposed to be doing in the windows.” Such verbal sexual harassment and indecent exposure can certainly be categorized as sexual abuse.

Sometimes the line between routine safety procedures and sexual or physical abuse seemed blurred or transgressed altogether. For example, strip searches are a procedure where guards make incarcerated people disrobe to ensure that no one is carrying any contraband. In some cases, guards may perform cavity searches, where the individual must expose their genitalia for inspection. This process is a disturbing and nonconsensual experience. Speaking of strip searches, Ann told me:

You have to get strip-searched. It's like, all the time... when you go out for work or you go on the hoe squad, they make you just go in, like an area, and, you know, strip down... When they do the pat-downs and stuff, they're always just grabbing you and... it's just disgusting... it's degrading so bad. Because they're just real rough... and they just make it as hard on you as humanly possible.

Even though prison officials argue that strip searches are a safety regulation, these descriptions demonstrate how this practice can toe the line of physical, or even sexual abuse, as a violation of bodily autonomy and consent. Cari echoed Ann’s point, stating, “Oh, at [Fleming], I was treated really well... I came from county and you would strip, butt naked, like cattle, and we were told to bust our pussy wide open. She was there with a flashlight looking and we had to and she said, ‘bust your pussy wide open.’” The way that Cari describes this cavity search was performed sounds intentionally degrading and very dehumanizing. As evidenced by Fleming, there is a more appropriate and “respectful” way to perform such a procedure; however, it seems as though this experience varied across the board. In sum, these accounts provide evidence that physical

and sexual abuse may not be as rampant inside women's prisons as other forms of abuse, but they are undoubtedly occurring.

Although abuse occurs in prison, the Texas prisons limit the options that women can choose from to address wrongs. There is a grievance system in place in Texas prisons, where incarcerated people can write down any complaints or problems they are having. People in prison need to have filed a Step One, Step Two, and Step Three grievance before they can file a lawsuit (Texas Civil Rights Project 2022). However, many women feel as if they cannot rely on the grievance process to address their issues. Out of 10 women who I discussed grievances with, eight had never filed a grievance. Ann told me she filed a grievance for an unspecific issue once but then gave up because "the grievances don't really go very far... You just kind of suffer through whatever you're suffering through." Speaking of filing grievances, Amber said, "You do when you... first go in and then it doesn't help... nothing ever gets done." Alicia called grievances "useless" and said, "they're just gonna throw it away." These accounts provide evidence that the grievance system is perceived by some to be ineffective; incarcerated women are restricted in their ability to address wrongdoings and such forms of abuse in prison.

It is also possible that these women's experiences with the legal system might have influenced their desire to enter into the grievance process. I asked Saraya if she used the grievance process, and she said, "No. I don't want to be in no court." Similarly, when I asked Tina if she filed a grievance, she said "I never did... I stayed away from the court all that stuff in there. Like I just tried to stay away from all that." As individuals who have been court-involved and sentenced to prison, these two women seem to view procedural justice as something to avoid rather than engage in.

Positive Sentiments

Kind guards and medical staff. So far, I have shared women's sentiments about how certain guards and medical staff may be verbally abusive, negligent, and overall behave poorly. While I have been careful to note that these perceptions were often very mixed, I believe it is important to highlight some of the more positive comments about the guards, medical unit, other imprisoned women, and overall incarceration experience. Highlighting the positives is necessary for the validity of my project. By presenting evidence that does not fit the overall pattern, I strive to maintain a credible account of these women's experiences in Texas prisons. Although many women reported guards behaving poorly, they often made clear that these were not the majority. Kandace had many bad things to say about guards, but she later stated this was not the majority of guards but a "couple bad apples," and Naomi agreed she mostly did not have any problems with guards. Speaking of the guards, Ty said, "I don't think it's ever 100 percent either way. I'd say more good some not so good mixed in." From these women's perspectives, not all guards were as bad as they described, and the staff was mostly good. Cece said:

I personally didn't have any problems with any of the guards but, you know, um I did see how sometimes you know they could be- um, they could misuse their authority, I should say. And you know what- talk crazy to people, but personally I never had any issues with anybody, but I have seen it with other people.

While Cece admits that not all guards were perfectly kind to each woman, she had no issues. In addition to these mixed reviews, many women expressed nothing but kind things about the guards. Chanel told me that a lot of the guards had a "positive energy." Faith echoed this sentiment, stating that overall, the guards were "really nice" and that she "was friends with a lot of them."

Similarly, a few women had nice things to say about the medical personnel on the unit. Faith said her medical treatment was "pretty good." Alicia seconded her opinion, stating that "the medical staff was great really. They were very nice. I didn't have any trouble with them." Amber

also called the medical staff “really nice” and said that “they treated you like an actual person. They didn’t treat you like a prisoner.” In this way, Amber felt respected and humanized by the staff. Furthermore, some women were able to rely on the medical staff for help. Cece would frequently have check-ups for her blood pressure, and she told me that “they would, you know, make sure that your health was okay, at that particular unit [Fleming]. I can’t speak for other units, but at that unit, I thought all of the medical staff was actually pretty nice.” Similarly, Kandace would get her blood pressure checked regularly due to her hypertension, and she never had any problems with them scheduling her appointments. The entire Texas Department of Criminal Justice medical system cannot be described as neglectful and not all the guards can be described as rude. Although some women experienced marked medical neglect and guard abuse, some women received compassion and aid from the officers and medical staff. As many different people as there are working for Texas prisons, we might expect a wide variety of experiences.

Harmony with other incarcerated women. Although a handful of the woman reported verbal and physical abuse from other incarcerated women, some women explained that they got along well with the other ladies. Chanel told me that “the people in the penitentiary is the sweetest people if you ask me. They just got caught.” She elaborated on this point, saying:

Everybody looked out for everybody... I was a kid, so, like everybody- I was locked up with other kids, so, like, everybody looked out for everybody. Like, if somebody didn’t have commissary like we looked out for them. The movies is like different... it’s not like that.

Chanel describes the women incarcerated at her unit actively “look[ing] out for” one another and helping. While Alicia didn’t express this same level of support, she did say that she “didn’t have any problems” getting along with other women because “everybody loved [her] babies” and “everybody wanted to see pictures of the babies.” Regardless of the reason, these women describe some reason or dynamic that brought her and the other ladies together peacefully.

Although a handful of ladies reported some casual racism at the unit, some people viewed race relations as more harmonious. Chanda, who claimed to be the “token Black” of her friend group, said, “Usually there wasn’t a lot of racism. There were two colors in prison: Grey and white. They wore grey and we wore white.” Here, Chanda described the divide between guards in grey and prisoners in white. Chanel echoed Chanda’s point, stating, “Whether you was Black, White, Mixed... if you’re an inmate, it was like, the inmates for the inmates. Now, it might be different, but back then, in the women’s penitentiary, like, no, the inmates stuck with the inmates.” Chanda and Chanel describe this “us” versus “them” mentality between the women in prison and the guards which illuminates a sort of solidarity amongst incarcerated people that seems distinct from what we have previously seen in the abuse sections. Many women remarked how they met women in prison who they became close friends with and some who they even keep in contact with today. Therefore, even in an institution marked by control and austerity, the potential for social connection and bonding cannot be understated.

Silver linings. Lastly, I feel it is important to share the few silver linings that women reported. Chanel and Tina both describe their incarceration as a learning experience. Chanel told me, “I don’t regret nothing. I regret the time I couldn’t get back, but I learned along the way and everything.” Tina also described her incarceration as a “learning lesson” that was “ordained to happen to do what I’m doing now to help the women that are behind bars and the women that are beyond bars.” To Tina, her incarceration helped connect her to her life mission of helping other women impacted by the prison system. She explained that when one goes to prison, one should “go in there to get your healing.” For this reason, she proposed a change in prison for “more programming” so women can “step back out and re-enter with that help.” Tina was one of four women who spoke of this need for programming so that women can have some form of

rehabilitation and therapy during their sentence. While some women seemed to engage in personal growth on their own, some might need an additional push that counseling and other programs could provide.

Like some others, Faith suffered traumatic events in prison. However, she stated, “I went through sexual abuse, mental abuse. But I overcame it. And it made me a stronger person... So I'm really proud of myself.” Faith holds an impressive positive mentality behind her incarceration, namely that what does not kill you makes you stronger. Similarly, Cece found a silver lining to her incarceration and said:

Getting incarcerated is what you make of it... you can allow it to be a downfall in your life, or you can allow it to be a stepping stone. You know, I used that time to, I guess, reintroduce [Cece] to [Cece], you know, to get to know myself a little bit better. Make some goals for my life and things that I want to do, so that I won't make the mistakes that I made to get to where I was.

Cece used her time to self-reflect on her past and present and plan for her life upon release.

Although some women really suffered during their incarceration, some women were able to use their time incarcerated as something positive. In sum, some women viewed their incarceration as something difficult but something that they could learn from, grow from, and make them stronger.

DISCUSSION

These results are meaningful in providing a more complete picture of women's experiences in Texas prisons. My findings reveal mixed sentiments about incarceration. Like everything social issue, women's experiences inside prison are not so black and white. In line with my research question, I did find evidence to support that some women experience family separation, mandatory labor, and forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, medical, and verbal. In line with the relevant literature, family separation and communication with the outside world

varies by woman, with some women more isolated than others (Lawrence, Stepteau-Watson, and Honoré-Collins 2007; Glaze and Maruschak 2008; Jackson 2011). In the cases where women were completely cut off from their families, I draw a connection to the “violence by other means” theory to describe how the United States historically and presently separates families of color.

The institution of prison creates and reinforces this separation between families. Specifically, the way that prisons were planned and constructed furthers family separation by impeding many from visiting. According to a 2015 report from Prison Policy Initiative, over 63 percent of people in state prisons are incarcerated over 100 miles away from their loved ones (Rabuy and Kopf 2015). This separation is mainly because most prisons in the United States are located far away from cities where many incarcerated people’s families live (Lockwood and Lewis 2019). Building prisons on rural land is cheaper. Also, Tracy Huling, who specializes in the history of prison towns, claims there is little opposition to building prisons in small rural towns with economies suffering from a decline in farming and manufacturing (Huling 2002; Lockwood and Lewis 2019). Accordingly, the majority of prisons that are located in rural areas cannot be reached by public transit, thus providing a major roadblock for families who want to visit but do not own a car. In this way, the intentionally placed geography of prisons restricts people’s ability to visit their loved ones and can drive a wedge between many families and their incarcerated family members.

However, my results also qualify my research question in showing how some women experienced closeness and support from their families. My analysis extends on the extant literature in providing an intersectional analysis of how one’s class might affect family separation, or conversely family closeness and support, due to relative resources such as time and

money. Women whose families had the time and money to visit and pay for phone calls seemed less impacted by family separation and were able to receive the family support that comes at a cost. Women who had financial support from their families for commissary also seemed to experience an increased quality of life inside prison.

My findings provide evidence to support that women in prison do not always experience forced labor to the full extent, as there are some options for work positions. However, my findings show that more often than not, work is menial and mandatory. Using “violence by other means theory,” I describe how the worst labor conditions mirror the old prison chain gang system, which itself mirrors conditions of slavery. This clear for-profit venture that capitalizes off of the unpaid labor of a disadvantaged group necessitates further research. Although undiscussed in my interviews, it is worth noting the ramifications an incarcerated Texan faces for refusing to work. Incarcerated people who refuse to work are penalized by losing their privileges and by being placed in “special cell restriction” where one must remain in the cell 24 hours a day (TDCJ n.d.). This means the person can no longer visit the commissary, chow hall, day room, or recreation, and her personal property is also confiscated (TDCJ n.d.). I advocate that we as social scientists conceptualize forced labor not only as any mandatory work but also as any work that is coerced by threats of punishment.

My findings provide limited evidence that class also affects work outcomes, as women who had more white-collar or educated backgrounds seemed to be assigned to better, less menial jobs: a finding which is in line with the literature (Crittenden, Koons-Witt, and Kaminski 2018; Gibson-Light 2019; Haney 2010). Utilizing an intersectional lens, I originally thought disability might affect prison outcomes. My findings revealed very limited evidence that disability status

may affect work outcomes in prison, for only one woman was disabled and therefore excused from working. This association between disability status and work necessitates further research.

Lastly, in line with the literature, I did find evidence for various forms of abuse; however, my findings revealed that sexual and physical abuse were not the most commonly reported forms of abuse, as the literature on prison abuse indicates (Alarid 2000; Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson 2006; Blackburn, Mullings, and Marquart 2008; Wolff, Shi, and Blitz 2008; Wooldredge and Steiner 2012; Solinas-Saunders 2012). Instead, I found that the more commonly reported forms of abuse were verbal and medical abuse, which are reflected in the literature although to a lesser extent (Goffman 1961; Young 2000; Ady, Farney, Wangmo, et al. 2014; Tsai 2014). For instance, many women reported verbally abusive guards and negligent medical staff, which seem to go against the prisons' purported mission of rehabilitation. This discrepancy between the commonly reported abuses in my research and others may be a reflection of my sample that only includes women. It is possible that physical and sexual abuse are more commonly occurring in men's units. Unlike the other two topics, one's class did not seem to affect abuse outcomes. However, my results did show very limited evidence of a connection between physical abuse and educational attainment.

While I found evidence to support that one's class may affect work and family outcomes, I found little to no evidence for how sexual orientation may affect one's outcomes in prison. While many women did report that cliques could be influenced by sexual orientation (e.g., "butch" women hanging out together), it did not seem to shape much more beyond social groups. This evidence may be limited because I only asked about sexual orientation in relation to social groups as I expected accounts about sexual orientation to arise naturally in the interviews. When asked about sexual orientation, many women mentioned butch women, which somewhat

conflates gender with sexual orientation. However, the examples participants provided of “butch” women grouping together point to a unique intersection between sexual orientation and gender, since butch is a term commonly used for more masculine-presenting lesbian women. The way that masculine and gender-nonconforming (GNC) women are treated in prison necessitates further research as well, especially considering the unique forms of violence and oppression that transgender and GNC inmates face in prison (Francisco 2021; Szuminksi 2021).

While the extant literature paints a rather dark view of prisons, my results demonstrate that women’s impressions of prison varied from negative to more neutral to positive, often depending on the subject discussed at hand. In this way, my findings contribute to the literature by extending what has been established in terms of family separation, labor, and abuse, but also creating a full picture of the nuanced perspectives women held of their experiences in prison.

CONCLUSION

The extant literature reveals that incarcerated people, and specifically women, may experience forced labor, family separation, and abuse. However, my research is unique in considering all three outcomes together to provide a multi-faceted analysis of Black women’s experiences in Texas prisons. When considering each of these experiences together, one can recognize the day-to-day difficulties that women must endure altogether inside Texas prisons. Furthermore, while many of the extant sources focused on prisons in the south, only two addressed Texas specifically and they are over a decade older (Huggins, Capeheart, and Newman 2006; Cunningham, Sorenson, and Cutler 2007). My project fills a gap in the current prison literature by providing an up-to-date and unique account of Black women’s experiences in Texas prisons.

Many of the sources also demonstrated the concept of intersectionality by revealing that key factors such as race, class, and sexual orientation affect outcomes in prison. I used an intersectional framework to explore to what extent Black women in Texas prisons experience adverse conditions such as forced labor, family separation, and abuse. Specifically, I tried to assess whether social class and, to a lesser extent, sexual orientation, seem to influence these prison conditions for Black women in Texas. Although my sample size is too small to make any definitive claims, the limited evidence for social class and its effects on work and family relations warrants further research. Using an intersectional framework allowed me to recognize how power and privilege played out in prison, especially in terms of work outcomes and family connections. By grounding my work in intersectionality and the “violence by other means” theory, I consider prison conditions in the context of America’s long and ongoing trend of oppressing and segregating people of color.

This study holds a few limitations. As mentioned, one issue was technological accessibility and skills amongst my interviewees. Some formerly incarcerated women do not have laptop computers and some were unfamiliar with using Zoom. Therefore, I was not always able to gain observations of body language and demeanor that I typically would in a face-to-face interview. Another limitation is that the data collected was based on recall. Thinking back on an unpleasant memory, especially if it occurred many years ago, can lead to some distorted accounts. These accounts are merely perceptions based on memory alone and cannot be taken as fact. I can only report what the perceived conditions were like for these women to uplift their stories. Furthermore, my study holds limitations due to the small sample size.

While I ultimately chose not to, I could have addressed each woman’s offense more explicitly to gain greater insight into the details of their arrest and ensuing incarceration. This

additional information may have helped ascertain whether experiences in prison may vary by the offense. Lastly, I could have examined gender identity and gender presentation in addition to sexual orientation. Some people in women's prisons are not cisgender, and different self-identified women in prisons have different gender presentations. These differences would have been important to highlight. Furthermore, my project could have gone further in analyzing sexual orientation. Although I asked one sub-question about sexual orientation, this topic should have been explored further in my interview guide to gain greater insight. Since my project failed to illustrate the impact of sexual identity on incarceration, more work is needed on sexual orientation in prison. Subsequent research would benefit from including the voices of queer formerly incarcerated people.

Despite these limitations, these interviews were valuable for many reasons such as providing crucial insight into policy changes from the standpoint of incarcerated women. Three major policy recommendations were suggested by the women I interviewed: Improved quality and quantity of food, increased programming in women's prisons, and increased opportunities for healing through counseling and enrichment classes. Based on the interviewees' remarks about the futility of grievances, I believe that the grievance system needs to be improved so that incarcerated people have a viable platform to voice their complaints and enact change.

In sum, my project extends current research not only by providing evidence for abuse, forced labor, and family separation but also by providing an account of more positive experiences that women had during their incarceration. Additionally, my project goes beyond the current literature by illustrating how the very institution of prison creates and reinforces conditions including forced labor, family separation, and abuse. These are not conditions that arise by coincidence or chance, but they are formed by the very infrastructure of prison. My

project also contributes to the scholarly work that examines women's incarceration through an intersectional lens. Furthermore, the results shed light on an institution that is arguably kept out of the public eye. By amplifying the voices of formerly incarcerated Black women, I hope to illustrate the conditions of Texas prisons and offer food for thought concerning what potential policy changes might be needed to improve the current system.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Information

Hi,

My name is Sloan Rucker, and I am a Sociology master's student at the University of Houston. I am currently researching Texas women's prisons for my thesis. I am interviewing formerly incarcerated Black women about their experiences in prison. The interview lasts about an hour and a half, and interviewees will be compensated \$30 for their time. All interviewees will read and sign a virtual consent form prior to participating in the interview. Please let me know if you or anyone you know could share their story. Any Black-identified adult woman who has been incarcerated in a Texas prison is eligible for interviews. Interviews will occur virtually via Zoom or telephone.

The following people are excluded from this study and therefore unable to participate: adults unable to consent (those who are cognitively impaired or illiterate), individuals who are not yet adults, pregnant women, prisoners, University of Houston students, and non-English speakers. If you meet any of these criteria, you are not eligible to participate. After hearing this list of disqualifiers, please decide if you are eligible to participate.

Women who identify as LGBTQ+ are especially encouraged to participate. This research study has been reviewed by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board.

Thanks,

Sloan

lsrucker@cougarnet.uh.edu

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

“Before we begin, I want to discuss what this interview will consist of and answer any questions you might have. I will ask you about your time spent incarcerated, and what your experience was like. Your participation is voluntary, and if you want to stop the interview at any time, we can. Some questions are more sensitive than others, and you have the right to not answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. The audio of this interview will be recorded, and I will delete the recording after the interview is finished and once I have transcribed our conversation. Do you have any questions?”

1. Where are you from?
2. What unit were you located in ?
 - a. What years did you spend incarcerated?
 - b. How old were you at the time?
3. How did your incarceration impact your relationship with your family?
 - a. What was your relationship like with your family before incarceration?
 - b. Which family members or friends kept in contact with you?
 - c. Did you receive phone calls, letters, or visits?
 - i. If you received visits, how far away was your family located?
 - ii. Was cost an issue in communicating with your family?
 - d. Did you receive commissary? If so, about how much were you provided, and how did commissary impact your quality of life in prison?
4. How did the people at your unit interact?
 - a. Were there conflicts between certain groups in prison?
 - b. Did you find that race factored into the formation of cliques inside prison?
 - c. Did sexuality factor into the formation of cliques?
 - d. Did you find a need to align yourself with a certain group for your comfort or safety?
5. How did you get along with your bunkie?
 - a. What were some of the challenges of sharing a small space?
 - b. How did you deal with these challenges?
 - c. Did you ever have any altercations with your bunkie, or other people in the dorms/ cell block? If so, what was the issue?

- d. Were there any housing policies for getting paired with a bunkie? For instance, matching by age, religion, etc?
- 6. Did you work while you were incarcerated?
 - a. What was your work assignment?
 - b. Did you receive any compensation for your work?
 - i. Any financial payment?
 - ii. Any “work time” credit?
 - c. How did you get the job? Did you sign up, or was the job assigned to you?
 - d. What were the labor conditions like?
 - i. How often did you work?
 - ii. How long were your shifts?
 - e. Did you receive any other work assignments during your incarceration?
 - f. Were there any jobs you wanted, but could not get? If so, why do you think this was the case?
 - g. Did your previous work experience help you get any jobs in prison?
 - h. Did your work in prison affect your work outcomes after getting out?
- 7. Did you spend any time in solitary confinement? If so, how would you describe your time in isolation?
 - a. How long were you in solitary confinement?
 - b. What did you do while you were in solitary confinement?
 - i. Could you have books, watch TV, etc?
 - ii. Were there any items you could not have or only have a limited number of?
 - iii. How many hours a day would you be in your cell?
 - c. What was the reason for your being in solitary?
 - d. Were you ever on isolated due to being on suicide watch?
 - i. If so, how would you describe that experience?
 - ii. How did mental health specialists provide help?
- 8. What were your interactions with the guards at your unit like?
- 9. Can you tell me a bit about your experience with the medical unit?
 - a. Could you step me through the process you had to go through to get medical attention?
 - b. Did you have to pay for medical services? If so, how much?
 - i. Was cost ever an issue for you in receiving services?
 - c. How quickly could you see a nurse after putting in a request?
 - d. How were you treated by the medical staff?
 - e. How would you describe the level of care you received?
 - f. Did you ever have to travel and visit different units to get medical attention? If so, what was that experience like for you?

10. Did you ever file a grievance about any negative conditions or treatment? If so, what was that process like?
11. If you could have a conversation with the head of TDC, what parts of prison would you tell him to change?
12. Is there anything else you'd like to add about your incarceration to help me better understand what it was like for you?

APPENDIX C



Consent to Take Part in a Human Research Study

Title of research study: An Intersectional Look at Women's Experiences in Texas Prisons

Investigator: Sloan Rucker, MA thesis under supervision of Dr. Samantha Kwan.

Key Information:

The following focused information is being presented to assist you in understanding the key elements of this study, as well as the basic reasons why you may or may not wish to consider taking part. This section is only a summary; more detailed information, including how to contact the research team for additional information or questions, follows within the remainder of this document under the "Detailed Information" heading.

What should I know about a research study?

- The investigator, Sloan Rucker, will explain this research study to you.
- Taking part in the research is voluntary; whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision to participate or not will not be held against you.
- Your decision to participate and responses will not affect parole status
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide, and can ask questions at any time during the study.
- If you are willing to participate, your name or other identifying information will not be shared. Your anonymity will be protected throughout the study.

We invite you to take part in a research study about Texas women's prisons because you meet the following criteria: Black adult woman over 18 years of age who has been formerly incarcerated in Texas prisons. This research is being funded by the Elizabeth Smith Chenoweth Graduate Fellowships and the Graduate Student Research Grant

through the University of Houston as part of a M.A. thesis in Sociology at the University of Houston.

In general, your participation in the research involves agreeing to a one and a half hour interview with questions related to family separation, labor, general interactions with and abuse from guards, and medical treatment. Prior to the interview you will be asked to fill out a brief demographic questionnaire.

There are no physical, privacy, legal, social, or economic risks associated with this research. It is possible that there could be some minor psychological risk if recounting negative experiences. One possible benefit may be the opportunity to contribute your story to research. You will receive compensation for participation in the form of a one time payment of \$30.

Detailed Information:

The following is more detailed information about this study, in addition to the information listed above.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of women who have been incarcerated in Texas prisons. Specifically, this research will focus on the experiences of Black women who have largely been absent from research on women's prisons. The purpose is to better understand the experiences of these women.

How long will the research last?

We anticipate each interview to be approximately 1.5 hours.

How many people will be studied?

We expect to enroll about 15 new people in this research study and re-consent 10 previously interviewed women for a total of 25 interviewees.

What happens if I agree to participate in this research?

- *A one-time 1.5 hour interview with investigator Sloan Rucker through Zoom or phone*
- *Interview questions will address family separation, employment, medical attention, interactions with staff, and day to day functions of the prison. You may skip any questions that are uncomfortable.*
- *~3 minutes to fill out a brief demographic questionnaire prior to the interview.*

With your permission, we would like to audio record the interview to ensure the accuracy of our notes. Please check the appropriate box below:

☐ I agree to be audio recorded during the research study.

- ☐ I agree that the audio recording can be used in publication/presentations.
- ☐ I do not agree that the audio recording can be used in publication/presentations.
- ☐ I do not agree to be audio recorded during the research study. In this case, you will be withdrawn from the study and will not participate in the interview.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

You can choose not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you. Choosing not to take part will involve no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your alternative to taking part in this research study is not to take part.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

You can leave the research and it will not be held against you. If you stop being in the research, already collected data that still include your name or other personal information will be removed from the study record.

If you decide to leave the research during the interview, you will receive only partial compensation which will be prorated based on the portion of the interview completed. For instance, the rate of \$30/1.5 hours means that the payment by minute is about .33 cents per minute. If an interviewee stays in the interview for ten minutes, she will receive \$3.30, if she stays in the interview for thirty minutes, she will receive \$9.90, and so on.

Subjects will not be asked to explain the extent of their withdrawal and no further data will be collected from them. Any data already collected *will be* removed from the study record.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

There are no physical, privacy, legal, social, or economic risks associated with this research. Should you be on parole, your answers or decision whether or not to participate will not influence or affect your parole status or standing. It is possible that there could be some minor psychological risk if recounting negative experiences. Special attention will be given to asking questions with sensitivity and each interviewee may decline to respond to any questions they feel troubling. If you choose to take part and undergo a negative event you feel is related to the study, please contact Sloan Rucker at lsrucker@cougarnet.uh.edu

Will I receive anything for being in this study?

Subjects will receive \$30 dollars through one of the three electronic money transfer apps: CashApp, Venmo, or Paypal.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include the opportunity to share your experience and contribute to scientific knowledge on prisons.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information private to people (research study personnel) who have a need to review this information. At the conclusion of the interview, all identifying information will be deleted from the data and replaced with a subject number. The list pairing the subject's name to the code number will be kept separate from these materials, and will only be known to Sloan Rucker.

However, we cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB) and other representatives of this organization, as well as federal agencies that oversee our research.

Your information that is collected as part of this research will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

We may share and/or publish the results of this research. Your name and other identifying information will be kept strictly confidential and will not be included in any publications or presentations of this research. In line with Texas' mandatory reporting laws, the only limitation on confidentiality will be if the interviewee discloses any current sexual abuse or neglect/abuse of children, the elderly, or the disabled. Any disclosure of doing or experiencing any past abuse or assault will not be reported. Crimes that have already been prosecuted will not be reported. Texas' mandatory reporting laws mandate that the researcher must file a report with the Department of Family and Protective Services if I suspect the neglect or abuse of these mentioned vulnerable populations. For this reason, there always exists the possibility of a breach of confidentiality.

Who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, you should talk to the research team at lsrucker@cougarnet.uh.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may also talk to them at (713) 743-9204 or cphs@central.uh.edu if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.

- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this research.

Signature of subject

Date

Printed name of subject

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

APPENDIX D



Consent to Take Part in a Human Research Study

Title of research study: An Intersectional Look at Women’s Experiences in Texas Prisons

Investigator: Sloan Rucker, MA thesis under supervision of Dr. Samantha Kwan.

Key Information:

The following focused information is being presented to assist you in understanding the key elements of this study, as well as the basic reasons why you may or may not wish to consider taking part. This section is only a summary; more detailed information, including how to contact the research team for additional information or questions, follows within the remainder of this document under the “Detailed Information” heading.

What should I know about a research study?

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Taking part in the research is voluntary; whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- Your decision to participate and responses will not affect parole status
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide, and can ask questions at any time during the study.

- If you are willing to participate, your name or other identifying information will not be shared. Your anonymity will be protected throughout the study.

We invite you to take part in a research study about Texas women's prisons because you meet the following criteria: Black adult woman over 18 years of age who has been formerly incarcerated in Texas prisons. This research is being funded by the Elizabeth Smith Chenoweth Graduate Fellowships and the Graduate Student Research Grant as part of an M.A. thesis in Sociology at the University of Houston. You have already participated in a one hour long interview about your time incarcerated in a Texas prison, complete with a demographic fact sheet and a consent form. These interviews occurred between February 2021 and April 2021. While those interviews were for a class project, I am now working on a similar project for my thesis. Your participation in this portion of the research will involve reading and choosing whether or not to sign this consent form. With your consent, I may utilize the transcripts of our past interviews to include in my thesis which have already been edited to remove any names or identifying factors.

In general, your participation in the research involves reading and signing this consent form indicating that you agree to include your previous interview with researcher Sloan Rucker in their master's thesis. Then, it involves sending the form back to Sloan Rucker at lsrucker@cougarnet.uh.edu. The process should not take more than an estimated 5 to 10 minutes.

There is no personal benefit to reconsenting and allowing for the use of the interview transcript in this current study. However, one possible benefit to society will be an increased awareness and understanding of Black women's experiences in Texas prisons. Through this consent form, you will be sharing your story. You will receive \$5 compensation for participation, including sending the signed form back to me.

There are no physical, legal, social, or economic risks associated with submitting your consent. There are no privacy issues either. In the transcripts of our interviews, I have erased your name and replaced with a pseudonym. Also, any identifying information like the certain prison unit you were incarcerated at has been also given a fake name/ pseudonym. There are no possible personal benefits, besides being able to share your story. You will receive \$5 compensation for participation.

Detailed Information:

The following is more detailed information about this study, in addition to the information listed above.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of women who have been incarcerated in Texas prisons. Specifically, this research will focus on the experiences of Black women who have largely been absent from research on women's prisons. The purpose is to better understand the experiences of these women.

How long will the research last?

The process of reading this consent form and signing should take anywhere from 5-10 minutes.

How many people will be studied?

We expect to re-consent about 10 people in this research study.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

If you agree to be in this research, you will only need to read, sign, and send this consent form. However, if you have any questions or need clarification on any part of this consent form before deciding to sign or not, you can contact the investigator at lsrucker@cougarnet.uh.edu. You have the opportunity to discuss the research project with the investigator before signing your consent. This can be done at your leisure; however, the deadline for submitting this consent form if you choose to do so will be December 21, 2021. Depending on the outcome and quality of my thesis, my paper may or may not be published in academic journals.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

You can choose not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you. Choosing not to take part will involve no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled. It will also not affect your parole status.

Instead of being in this research study, your choices may include: Not participating and refusing to sign.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

If you stop being in the research, already collected data that still include your name or other personal information will be removed from the study record. You can leave this research and it will not be held against you. If you submit this consent form then change your mind and decide you would not like to use our interviews for my thesis, you can contact the research team at

lsrucker@cougarnet.uh.edu and I will not use your information. There are no adverse consequences to withdrawing from the research.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

There are no physical, privacy, legal, social, or economic risks associated with this research. Should you be on parole, your answers or decision whether or not to participate will not influence or affect your parole status or standing. If you choose to take part and undergo a negative event you feel is related to the study, please contact [Sloan Rucker at lsrucker@cougarnet.uh.edu](mailto:Sloan.Rucker@lsrucker@cougarnet.uh.edu)

Will I receive anything for being in this study?

You will receive \$5 compensation through one of three money transfer apps: CashApp, Venmo, or Paypal. This payment will not be pro-rated and it will only occur if all procedures are completed i.e. the consent form has been read, signed, and sent back to me.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include the opportunity to share your experience and contribute to scientific knowledge on prisons.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information private to people (research study personnel) who have a need to review this information. At the conclusion of the interview, all identifying information were deleted from the data and replaced with initials. The list pairing the subject's name to the initials were kept separate from these materials, and are only known to Sloan Rucker.

However, we cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB) and other representatives of this organization, as well as federal agencies that oversee our research.

Your information that is collected as part of this research will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

We may share and/or publish the results of this research. Your name and other identifying information will be kept confidential and will not be included in any publications or presentations of this research

Who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, you should talk to the research team at lsrucker@cougarnet.uh.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may also talk to them at (713) 743-9204 or cphs@central.uh.edu if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this research.

Signature of subject

Date

Printed name of subject

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

APPENDIX E

Demographic Fact Sheet

Age _____

Race _____

Birth place _____

Current marital status _____

Number and ages of children _____

Education: highest level reached _____

Are you currently a University of Houston student? [Yes / No]

Total number of years incarcerated _____

Time since release _____

Occupation _____

Sexual Orientation _____

Religion _____

APPENDIX F

Mental Health Resources

Hotlines

National Suicide Prevention Hotline 800.273.8255

MHMR Crisis Hotline 1 (800) SUICIDE (784-2433)

Houston Crisis Hotline 832.416.1177

The Harris Center for Mental and IDD Helpline 713.970.7000

Crisis Text Line - Text HOME to 741741

National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline: 800.656.HOPE(4673)

Trans Lifeline 877.565.8860

COVID-19 Mental Health Support Line 833.986.1919

Texas dial 2-1-1 or 877.541.7905

Abilene Crisis Line 325.677.7773

Crisis Support Line Texas Panhandle Mental Health 806.358.6699

Austin-Travis County Mental Health Hotline 512.472.4357

Beaumont Rape & Suicide Crisis Hotline 409.835.3355

West Texas Centers for Mental Health Hotline 1.800.375.4357

Tri-County Mental Health Line (Montgomery, Liberty, Walker Counties) 1.800.659.6994

Denton County Mental Health Crisis Hotline 1.800.762.0157

Lubbock Crisis Intervention 806.765.8393

Midland Health Line 432.570.3300

Odessa Health Line 432.333.3265

San Angelo Crisis Line 325.653.5933

San Antonio Crisis Line 210.223.7233

Wichita Falls Line 1.800.621.8504

Organizations

The Rape Crisis Center (San Antonio) 210.349.7273

Dallas Area Rape Crisis Center 972.641.7273

Rape Crisis & Victim Services (Fort Worth) 817.927.2737

Turning Point Rape Crisis Center (Plano) 972.985.0951

Concho Valley Rape Crisis Center 325.655.2000

NAMI Texas (National Alliance on Mental Health) 512.693.2000

Texas Health and Human Services 877.541.7905

Legacy Community Health (sliding scale counseling in Houston) 832.548-5000

The Montrose Center (LGBTQ affirming services in Houston) (832) 548-5000

Free online help

<https://www.7cups.com/> (volunteer listeners are not licensed therapists)

<https://etherapypro.com/> (free 3 day trial, cancel anytime)

BlahTherapy (free chat function, volunteer listeners are not licensed therapists)