

CATOE, KRISTEN. M.A. How Convict Criminologists Navigate Stigma. (2021)
Directed by Dr. David Kauzlarich. 105 pp.

The purpose of this study is to explore how those involved with the Convict Criminology Group navigate any stigma related to their criminal history. While not all members of this group have a criminal history, many do. I conducted semi structured interviews with six such members of this group to answer two research questions. How do these members historically and contemporarily perceive and manage stigma related to their criminal history? How has involvement with the Convict Criminology Group influenced these perceptions and management strategies? Analysis reveals that involvement with the Convict Criminology Group has had a positive impact on the majority of the participants' perceptions of their stigma by providing them with hope for a successful future. Findings suggest the group's affect is positive and related to giving members support and providing them with opportunities to support others.

HOW CONVICT CRIMINOLOGISTS NAVIGATE STIGMA

by

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A Thesis

Submitted to

the Faculty of The Graduate School at

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Greensboro

2021

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November 29, 2021

Date of Acceptance by Committee

November 29, 2021

Date of Final Oral Examination

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	v
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	3
Stigma.....	3
Employment	5
Education.....	6
Employment of Educated “Ex-Cons”	8
Stigma: Management and a Modified Labeling Theory	10
Voices from Convict Criminology	14
Journey to Convict Criminology	17
Experiences with Education	17
Involvement with Autoethnography and Research Interests.....	18
CHAPTER III: METHODS	21
Study Design	21
Recruiting Interviewees.....	22
Confidentiality.....	23
Coding	24
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS, PART I.....	25
The Unique Stories of Convict Criminologists	25
Valarie	27
Jenn.....	33
Jesse.....	39
Zaria.....	45
Micky.....	51
Lucas.....	58
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, PART II.....	65
Perceiving Stigma: Expecting, Experiencing, and Reacting to Rejection	65
Expecting Rejection.....	65

Experiencing Rejection	67
Reacting to Rejection	71
Managing Stigma: Reducing Rejections or Processing Them	74
Reducing Personal Rejections	74
Withdrawal.....	75
Secrecy.....	76
Finding Comfort Through Rejection.....	79
Social Support.....	79
Self-Worth and Pride	81
Reducing the Stigma.....	82
The Convict Criminology Group and its Impact on Perceptions and Management	84
The Convict Criminology Group as an Apparatus for Coping.....	85
The Convict Criminology Group as Evidence of Success	86
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION	91
REFERENCES	94
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	99
APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC FACE SHEET FOR A STUDY OF CONVICT CRIMINOLOGISTS.....	104
APPENDIX C: SELF-DISCLOSED DEMOGRAPHIC MAKEUP OF PARTICIPANTS	105

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Self-Disclosed Demographic Makeup of Participants.....	26
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Convict Criminology (CC) is a young criminological perspective and group, only officially forming in the late 1990s, though informal group meetings began as early as the 1960s (Tietjen, 2019). “Convict’s” involvement in academia arose when formerly incarcerated (FI) people found that institutions of higher education could be an environment to research and share wisdom from their carceral experiences. Though it does not yet have an official theory, CC is a perspective that utilizes the unique experiences of its members to provide an insider-viewpoint that can challenge conventional knowledge in criminology (Tietjen, 2019). The Convict Criminology group’s mission is to “[create] an academic space for formerly incarcerated academics’ voices to be heard, critically [examine] the massive social inequalities present in the current American criminal justice system, and [formulate] progressive/rehabilitative correctional policy” (Tietjen 2013:3). Members of the CC group often gain their membership when they are already academically inclined and then continue on that path post-conviction (Tietjen, 2019). This path is called the “detour” route. Others overcome the hardships of economic disadvantage and marginalization pre- and post-conviction in the pursuit of activism, called the “force of nature” route. Still, others find the CC group through the “noncon” route, peripheral contact with the prison system while not having any first-hand experience with it. Once established in the academic field, many FI professionals choose to keep their past a secret to avoid further backlash from students and faculty (Tietjen, 2019).

I interviewed Convict Criminologists to understand how being a Convict Criminologist relates to experiencing and navigating stigma. I began this project intending to explore the connections between experiences with criminal stigma and teaching and researching aspects of crime, victimization, and/or criminal justice, subject matter that is so closely related to the source

of that stigma. A professorship requires several years of higher education in the midst of numerous costs and hardships that come after incarceration, and a willingness to face these challenges in pursuit of a professorship could have implied a strong relationship with their chosen career which could then, potentially, have had a strong impact on their perception of their stigma. However, after speaking with the participants and hearing their stories, I learned that teaching subject matter closely related to their own experiences with stigma was less important to their perceptions of their stigma than interpersonal interactions and general life-experience with their new criminal status. Issues such as searching for employment, their experiences with higher education, and their roles inside the Convict Criminology group did contribute to gaining that life experience and made some impact on their perceptions and management of their criminal stigma.

In the following literature review, I will attempt to reveal the connections between stigma and employment, stigma and education, and finding “meaning” in a job as a Convict Criminologist.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Stigma

In a review of the advances of Goffman's theory of stigma, Bos, Pryor, Reeder, and Stutterheim (2013, p. 1) call the concept - "an attribute that results in widespread social disapproval". Social disapproval could be described as one of Pryor and Reeder's (2013) four types of stigmas, public stigma. Other types include self-stigma, stigma by association, and structural stigma. The public type encompasses the reactions of people who perceive others as stigmatized; those reactions include anger, sympathy, anxiety, emotional ambivalence, fear, and avoidance depending on the culpability, severity, dangerousness, and norm violation of the deviant (Bos et al., 2013). Self-stigma describes the negative treatment enacted on the deviant person, how that person experiences the treatment, and the decreased self-worth through the internalization of the experience. People who experience this learn to accept and expect negative treatment from others.

Stigma by association happens when people who have some kind of relationship with a deviant person also feel the effect of their stigmatization; this most often occurs to family members, but also to people who have a social or even an arbitrary connection with them (Bos et al., 2013). Some people choose to cut ties with that person to avoid becoming stigmatized themselves. Structural stigma arises when institutions generate a stigmatized status for a group of people, which reproduces social inequalities (Bos et al., 2013). Stigma against ex-offenders is common in most places, but actually decreases in areas where incarceration is a common occurrence (Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010). People with criminal records aren't subject to ostracization in those areas, showing a normalization effect. On the other hand, people who see

the denouncers of offenders, the criminal justice system¹ (CJS), as a legitimate force often perceive offenders as deserving of their punishment and stigma against them increases.

Stigma can be operationalized as prejudice and discrimination. These take the form of collateral consequences, which can “haunt” a person long after their carceral experience. Even after the punishment of conviction and incarceration is over, the social and often legal punishments continue for years, essentially “piling on” top of each other (Uggen & Stewart, 2015). An excellent example of this cumulative effect comes from an interview Uggen and Stewart (2015) conducted with a man, Michael, and his hardships while finding employment. After his DUI felony conviction, Michael earned a four-year degree in social work; however, his felony put barriers between him and his licensure. Even when he did eventually get his license, after several months of letters and Board appearances, his work applications were consistently rejected. He found a position after months of searching, used his savings to move his family to the small town that accepted him, and was fired two months later because of his felony record.

As Michael’s case demonstrates, the accessibility of criminal records often has a negative impact on securing employment, education, and public assistance (Uggen & Stewart, 2015; Western, 2008). FIs could be restricted from occupations where they would be responsible for the safety of the elderly, children, or people with mental or physical limitations because they might not pass a “good character” test. They are dehumanized by websites, have extreme difficulty finding partners, and are restricted from common and expected parenting activities like chaperoning (Uggen & Stewart, 2015). There are a limited number of areas where they can live and congregate. Many have no access to healthcare due to their restricted use of public assistance

¹ It’s important to remember the reality of the so called “criminal justice system.” There is often very little justice involved, and it could more accurately be named a “State Control Apparatus.” However, CJS is the most commonly recognizable term and I reluctantly use it here for simplicity and consistency.

and lack of employment. They are not able to vote or be on juries, which restricts certain demographics from being judged by a jury of their peers (Uggen & Stewart, 2015). While the consequences of contact with the CJS are numerous, I will focus on the difficulties surrounding employment and education.

Employment

The most commonly observed consequence for incarceration and conviction is unemployment and its effect on recidivism. Some scholars believe unemployment's effect on recidivism is minimal and reduced recidivism is a result of age alone while life-course model scholars claim that the work-effect on crime varies with age (Uggen, 2000). Uggen used an experimental design to test if the assignment of a job, participation in the job, and the eligibility for work for over 3000 previously incarcerated people would reduce recidivism. Results showed that older offenders were less likely to recidivate than younger offenders on assignment and eligibility, which were measured as arrest rates and illegal earnings. Participation showed reduced recidivism for both younger and older offenders in the treatment group. In addition, recidivism is also reduced when the job is of "good quality" (Uggen, 1999), defined by the Quality Employment Survey as a job that reduces strain, increases incentives to avoid crime, and helps workers display interdependence. These findings support the life-course model that the interaction between employment and age, and not age alone, affects recidivism (Uggen, 2000).

In employment searches, there are some employers that claim to be "friendly" to ex-felons (Pager & Quillian, 2005). However, people's behaviors sometimes don't match their attitudes when presented with the situation in real life, especially when the attitudes are directed toward stigmatized populations like the previously convicted. An audit was conducted for employers, with testers presenting themselves as white and black non-offenders and ex-offenders

submitting very similar job applications to see who would get a callback. These same employers were interviewed later to see if they purported an openness to hire previously incarcerated people. The surveys showed much higher rates of supposed openness than the audit's real-life results. This implies that employers of any sort that might say they're willing to hire people with convictions might not actually do so in practice (Pager & Quillian, 2005).

It's not just the previously incarcerated that face hardships when looking for employment. The prevalence and easy accessibility of criminal background checks means that even people with low level arrests face similar difficulties (Uggen et al., 2014). Criminal information that would never have reached employers ears is now making people who have never been convicted undesirable workers. In a 2014 study by Uggen and his colleagues, a white and a black man were instructed to apply to over 300 jobs and to disclose a disorderly conduct arrest with no conviction on their applications. These men experienced a four percent drop in callbacks compared to when they did not disclose any arrest information. Even though they were not convicted of anything, their employability was still negatively impacted by their association with a crime.

Education

Just as there are barriers for finding employment after conviction and incarceration, there are barriers to getting an education. Public schools are more likely to accept students with a criminal history (O'Neil, 1990), but many schools will have policies in place that either disqualify or inconvenience students with this stigmatized status. Sexual offenses create more legal restrictions than some other offences, and the negative perceptions of sex offenders is made worse by the publication of their location and criminal history (Rubenstein et al., 2019). More than half of higher education institutions ask about criminal records, some of which automatically deny applications for specific sex offenses. In Rubenstein, Tabacyk, and Jelic's

study, 38% of their school sample said students with sex offenses faced further restriction while on campus (2019). Higher education is often needed for quality professions and is an arduous ordeal. Formerly incarcerated students— especially sex offenders—face an even more grueling journey because of their stigma and discriminatory policies in place that restrict their movements.

Campus safety is an often-cited reason for requiring background checks or asking about criminal history during the admission process (Uggen & Stewart, 2015). In schools that only ask for disclosure, students who truthfully and voluntarily admit to having had contact with the criminal justice system are subjected to further scrutiny that inherently disqualifies them from admission. Some public colleges in New York even request official documents from the State Division of Criminal Justice services even though such reports are confidential and sending them to a third party like a school is illegal. Other schools require statements from parole officers or evidence of good conduct. Histories of felonies and violent crimes are “concerning” to admission officials (Uggen & Stewart, 2015, p. 1886). Some schools prefer that applicants complete their parole before admitting them because it is an indicator for effective reintegration, while others prefer students still be under some kind of official supervision because it keeps students accountable. There are also restrictions to federal aid, where drug possession or sale will make applicants ineligible to receive financial aid for an amount of time (Uggen & Stewart, 2015). Admirably, the Convict Criminology group advocates on behalf of formerly incarcerated students and faculty members who face discrimination at their college or university, sometimes filling law suits against such institutions with some success (Richards 2013).

A carceral experience can be an “invisible stigma” for students (Halkovic & Greene, 2015). Even after getting into a school, some FIs may try to hide their history as best they can.

There's a potential for being treated differently, like an outsider, if others find out. The weight of that feeling can hinder a student's ability to fully participate in their education. If classmates or faculty do uncover a formerly incarcerated student's past, if that student is "exposed," they may face indirect discrimination. In an interview with Halkovic and Greene (2015), one student revealed that his classmates' body language changed after they learned of his past; they sat away from him and "lost" his email address when they had group projects together. That kind of exclusion can easily induce anxiety and unease, creating the kind of stress that obstructs learning.

Stigma is felt and performed in a variety of ways. It can be felt directly by the stigmatized individual, or it can be the actions of others that amplify a person's experience of stigma. The difficulties a person faces in attaining employment and an education after their official punishment reveals that their punishment lasts long after leaving the CJS's custody.

Employment of Educated "Ex-Cons"

Formerly Incarcerated individuals who have successfully navigated their education and earned their PhD must endure further trials as they transition into seeking employment in criminology and criminal justice programs.

Below is a review of a study by Murphy, Ross, Jones, and Richards (Murphy et al., 2011) that explored the experiences of faculty candidates with criminal histories during the hiring process. In this study, research participants discussed their experiences applying for tenure track positions and the impact their criminal records had on their employment. Already arduous for those without stigmatizing statuses, the tenure route can be even more daunting for those with criminal convictions, especially the interview stage. Knowing the likelihood of being subjected to a criminal background check and being asked about their criminal history can be discouraging for interested candidates. However, there are fewer vocation options available to FIs compared to

other applicants, knowledge which can add even more emotional strain to these tenure-hopefuls (Murphy et al. 2011; Richards 2013). When asked about disclosing their status, many revealed that they were open about it very early on in the interview process or that their application included publications with information about their criminal history. Hiring committee reactions to this information varied among respondents, with some candidates feeling comfortable that their history apparently did not matter while others felt it was obvious that the faculty wished to ask about it or even that their chances were ruined by the reveal. From this study, though not generalizable due its small sample size and qualitative character, the consensus was that early disclosure of criminal history was handled by hiring committees with civility and was even advantageous for some of the candidates (Murphy et al., 2011).

Many of the interviewees discussed their encounters with the CJS during their classroom observations or research presentations throughout the hiring process (Murphy et al., 2011). Respondents described their experiences doing so as positive and perhaps beneficial for their employment chances. Even when meeting administrators, the researchers' interviews revealed little evidence for discriminatory behavior toward prospective candidates and new hires based on their criminal status. Many accounts implied a disinterest or lack of knowledge about the candidates' personal history on the part of the administrators.

Regarding the "employability" of FIs and people with convictions as university faculty, many interviewees revealed that they were often times dropped from the candidate pool once their criminal history was "discovered;" that is to say, this was a more typical occurrence for those who had not discussed their status or waited until the end of the interview process to reveal it (Murphy et al., 2011). For these cases, the decision not to hire may have been a result of perceived dishonesty rather than criminal status, though the study could not confirm this notion.

Overall, candidates with criminal histories were well-received by hiring committees and treated with respect, civility, and, perhaps, some curiosity. However, respondents provided differing reports about perceived prejudice against them on the subject of receiving a job offer. Though variances for these experiences appeared to be somewhat loosely related to the time of disclosure, it was not in the scope of the study to determine the committees' reasoning for not providing an offer. The researchers discuss a potential reason for non-offers being hiring personnel's fearfulness of a candidate reoffending and besmirching the university's reputation (Murphy et al., 2011).

Stigma: Management and a Modified Labeling Theory

Stigmatizing statuses are not limited to the criminal realm. People facing stigma include the physically disabled, mentally ill, those experiencing treatment for sicknesses, racial minorities, sexual orientation and gender minorities, and many others. Being prescribed a stigmatized status is an aspect of labeling, whereby the labeled person internalizes the cultural conception of the labeled status (Scheff, 1966). Bruce Link, Struening, Cullen, Shrout, and Dohrenwend developed a modified adaptation of Scheff's labeling theory and also introduced styles of stigma management (Link et al., 1989). While this study does not deal with criminal stigma directly, focusing instead on the mentally ill, I believe similar management styles may be used for various stigmatizing statuses.

Stigmatization is a process and the first step involves the community's conceptualization of the stigmatizing status through the media and other methods of communication, like casual conversation and humor (Link et al., 1989). This includes how much community members believe mentally ill people will be devalued and discriminated against. It's important to note that this step involves the perceptions of everyone in the community, not just those who are mentally

ill. The second step is the official labeling of a person, meaning the diagnosis for a mental illness. This makes the concept of the label relevant to the self. The common conception of what it means to have a stigmatizing label necessitates the *expectation* that the self will be devalued and discriminated against once they receive that label. People with the status are socialized through media portrayal of that status to expect rejection (Link et al., 1989). For the purposes of this study, conceptualization of a label is that of a “criminal” and the official labeling act is being convicted of committing a crime, though stigmatization can happen through any contact with the CJS.

Step three of the “process” includes the behaviors mentally ill people engage in to manage their stigmatized status (Link et al., 1989). The first one, secrecy, entails keeping their status a secret from people in an attempt to avoid rejection. This includes family members, friends, and potential employers. The second strategy is withdrawal, where mentally ill people retreat into groups who already know about their status and or accept their stigmatized condition (Link et al., 1989). Experiencing comfort when interacting with others that know and accept their status lends to the idea of normalization over legitimization for criminal status that Hirschfield and Piquero observed (2010). The last strategy for managing stigma is preventative telling (Link et al., 1989). The intent behind this behavior is to change the conception others have of the stigmatized label. While the first two strategies are examples of passive acceptance of the negative attitude others have towards their status, the third is an attempt to enlighten others about the reality of the condition and could reduce negative attitudes towards the status. Preventative telling is the riskiest strategy because it provides opportunities for rejection, devaluation, and discrimination.

Steps four and five in the process of stigmatization include the consequences of stigma which create a vulnerability to future mental disorders (Link et al., 1989). Vulnerability to mental disorders, while a concern that people with criminal histories may face, is not a salient concern for this project so I will focus on step four. Managing stigma has the potential to limit life opportunities. Secrecy can backfire to the point where people feel betrayed and lied to. Secrecy may not even be a totally viable strategy for a criminal status due to the vast availability of criminal background checks. Withdrawal is necessarily limiting because social interaction is restricted to those that are familiar and accepting of a criminal status. While that does not discount the possibility of a good life, a person will have fewer opportunities to succeed. Preventative telling also has the potential to limit life chances, but it is the only method whereby the stigmatized person does not accept their limitations without attempting to expand their opportunities.

Link et al's study found that mentally ill patients that were most concerned with their stigmatized status were more likely to rely on "insular support networks," and to have little support outside their household (1989). Depending on their community, and its position as a normalizing or legitimizing context, people who have been recently convicted or recently released from incarceration could experience a similar effect. Those in legitimizing contexts may try to keep their status secret or withdraw from their community, while those in normalizing contexts may have a broader "area" to withdraw to. They may also be selective in their secrecy, choosing to disclose their status to colleagues but perhaps not to friends or acquaintances. Members of the Convict Criminology group, by the nature of their existence, are not able to practice withdrawal on a large scale. They do have very similar experiences and knowledge of each other's potential "criminal" status, making withdrawal appear to be a likely coping

mechanism for them. However, CCs do not limit their interactions with only each other.

Preventative telling, the disclosure and education about their status, is likely the most widely used stigma management strategy from Link et al.'s strategy among CCs.

So far, I have described coping mechanisms against stigma as a set of behaviors FIs can pick from to best suit their needs (Link et al., 1989). A more general representation of coping with stigma can be as obvious as receiving social support. In his presidential address to the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences about the potentials for a social support criminological paradigm, Francis Cullen suggests that social support can even be considered the opposite or reversal of stigmatization (1994). Cullen describes social support, not as passively received, but interpreted and anticipated in social situations (1994). Support is either instrumental or expressive. It is instrumental when the social relationship acts as a channel to achieving material goals, like financial assistance, advice, or guidance. It is expressive when the social relationship is the goal, where individuals in the relationship meet each other's emotional needs through feedback and socialization. Social support is often exchanged between individuals, but it can also occur through social networks and larger communities. Individual exchanges are typically considered informal support, where people in the social relationship lack any official status relative to each other. Support is more formal when there is an official capacity to the relationship, like support through schools, government programs, or even the CJS (Cullen, 1994).

While Cullen's address is intended to propose social support as a theory to explain crime, its implication as an opposite to stigmatization is noteworthy for this project. This suggestion is reasonable since stigmatization can be alienating and often results in decreased social support such as the loss of meaningful relationships (Bos et al., 2013; Uggen & Stewart, 2015). Re-

establishing social relationships and receiving social support, while incapable of “un-doing” or removing a stigmatized status, may help to mitigate its effects on FIs.

Voices from Convict Criminology

Convict Criminology is a formal Division within the larger progressive to radical field of Critical Criminology. Critical Criminology is a perspective that views the sources of crime and law as rooted in the inequalities present in race, class, and gender distinctions, which also shape society’s reaction to so-called “criminals” and norm violators (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2018). Critical Criminology is deeply connected to politics, activism, and social justice, often with objectives like prison abolition and “radical cultural change” (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2018, p. 2). A major advancement of Critical Criminology, when compared to more orthodox or mainstream criminological perspectives, is the shift from a focus on the flaws of “criminals” to the flaws of societies that create and reproduce individuals who engage in acts that same society deems “criminal.” Convict Criminology offers a very unique perspective to Critical Criminology, produced by individuals who have that criminal label and a desire to contribute to accurate and contextualized knowledge about the criminal justice system (Richards et al., 2018).

Convict Criminologists have historically used their personal experiences with the CJS to supplement their research through autoethnographies, though not all CCs choose to do so (Earle, 2017; Tietjen et al., 2020). Autoethnography is a type of participant observation strategy within qualitative research (Muncey, 2010). Manning and Adams describe it as “a method that blends the purposes, techniques, and theories of social research—primarily ethnography—with the purposes, techniques, and theories associated with genres of life writing, especially autobiography, memoir, and personal essay” (2015, p. 189). People who utilize autoethnographies in their research perhaps do so “because the literature they are reading is not

telling their story” (Muncey, 2010, p. 3). Autoethnographies can offer methodological benefits, like finding and gaining access to hard-to-reach or protected populations by being a member of that population (Rambo et al., 2019) or more easily gaining the trust of a group of which the researcher is also a member (Newbold et al., 2014). However, it can also create difficulties such as further stigmatizing the author through publishing their experiences related to their stigmatized statuses. Critics of this research method see it as lacking rigor or being too self-indulgent, considering it an illegitimate form of study (Rambo et al., 2019). However, autoethnographies provide context, an ethic of care, and a genuine representation of the intricacy within social problems like those Convict Criminologists investigate (Rambo et al., 2019). By using their own personal stories and reflexivity, CCs are able to contextualize their research within their own experiences.

An excellent example of autoethnographic research by a Convict Criminologist is Alan Mobley’s “Nothing Personal: Mass Incarceration, Prisoner Reentry, and Disillusionment” (2013). In this piece, Mobley provides an account of his own experiences with “reentry,” describing it as an on-going process that continues years after release. He illustrates his attempts to achieve tenure with his university, a time in his life that challenged his reentry. The challenge was in part due to the insecurities that the tenure process induces in people, specifically the apathy, despair, and disillusionment that can be especially risky contributing factors to crime and recidivism (Mobley, 2013). Mobley expresses very personal emotions of despair and fear about returning to the privatized, individual pathology learned from prison. Interspersed in his intimate account of his lessons inside the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons is an analysis of Irvin’s convict code of conduct and Raymond Williams’ review of privatization in Western societies (paraphrased in Mobley 2013). By supplementing this analysis with a self-examination of his

own feelings and encounters while imprisoned, Mobley explains how this pathology entails internal dispossession and displacement as well as an overwhelming sense of personal accountability to the point of learned helplessness and distrust in others. He describes his own research and volunteer work with prisons as a “simulated and virtual” repetition of the criminal justice system process and claims he can’t “leave it alone. Because it won’t leave me alone” (Mobley, 2013, p. 5). This autoethnographic study reveals the personal details such authors are willing to expose to their readers as a part of their research.

As is the case with Alan Mobley’s research, autoethnographies can be a deeply personal piece of academic literature. I believe the willingness to reveal such intimate details about one’s life demonstrates a dedication to research that may not be explicitly obvious in more conventional research methodologies. When those details are stigmatizing, like the ones disclosed by formerly incarcerated individuals, the commitment and enthusiasm for accurate and representative information is even more apparent.

In preparation for this project, I examined seven personal accounts and/or autoethnographic studies of Convict Criminologists (Frana 2013; Honeywell 2013; Horowitz 2013; Mobley 2013; Richards 2013; Tietjen 2013; Trombley 2013). The purpose of this review was to explore commonalities between these individuals related to their journey to Convict Criminology, their experiences with education, and their research interests and participation with autoethnographic research. Below is a brief review of my observations. Though these stories/studies have already been published and are included in my references, I will refrain from using their names to protect their privacy as much as possible.

Journey to Convict Criminology

Personal accounts of managing stigma and higher education have been written by both graduate students and full-time faculty within crime and criminal justice programs. Their experiences, while unique and different, share some commonalities on their paths to the Convict Criminology group. All of the authors came to the CC collective through either the “detour” route or the “force of nature” route (Tietjen, 2019). Of the five who mention CC in these pieces, two were contributors to the founding of the group and important figures in its official formation (Richards et al. 2018; Richards 2013). Two “stumbled” across it while preparing for their own research or through conferences, and one just happened to be a research participant in a study conducted by Convict Criminologists (Frana 2013; Horowitz 2013; Tietjen 2013). Two of these accounts speak to the frustration FIs may feel when they are confronted with the inaccuracies of more traditional criminology and criminal justice perspectives and how that frustration can inspire a desire to be involved with CC (Frana 2013; Richards 2013). For two of these accounts, the Convict Criminology Group acts as a place where someone with a criminal record can feel like they belong and be their authentic self with people similar to themselves, or at least a people with whom they share a profound experience (Richards 2013; Trombley 2013).

Experiences with Education

In addition to the pathways these students and faculty took toward CC, they also share some similarities with their educational experiences and how they intermingle with their time in federal or state custody. In these personal stories and autoethnographic studies, all seven authors made some mention of their education. Three of these seven had taken college level courses prior to their incarceration with varying degrees of success, from simply not finishing before their imprisonment to failing out (Richards 2013; Tietjen 2013; Trombley 2013). Six out of these

seven accounts continued their education while in custody, two of them even completing degrees during this time while the rest did so after leaving custody or were still completing their degrees at the time of these written accounts (Frana 2013; Honeywell 2013; Horowitz 2013; Mobley 2013; Richards 2013; Tietjen 2013). The legal restrictions to these authors' access to education while incarcerated may have been different depending on the time and area they were in custody. Three of the authors revealed that they believed their education was a major factor in their desistance from crime (Frana, 2013; Honeywell, 2013; Tietjen, 2013). Only one author disclosed a perceived discriminatory experience due to his criminal background, though another author conveyed his awareness that his felonious status and the discriminatory practices that result from it limited his opportunities for success (Frana 2013; Richards 2013).

Involvement with Autoethnography and Research Interests

Three of these publications are autoethnographies whereby the authors use their own past interactions with the criminal justice system to examine some criminological concept (Frana, 2013; Mobley, 2013; Tietjen, 2013). While one author focuses on reentry as an ongoing process, the other two discuss desistance and its contributing factors. One spotlights life course trajectories and turning points, specifically the role probation officers have in facilitating turning points, and the other illustrates the importance of education and mentorship within CC (Frana, 2013; Tietjen, 2013). Three of these authors also mention positive opinions about autoethnography (Frana 2013; Richards 2013; Tietjen 2013). They express their belief that their past can be used to inform research and publications, how it can provide insight into prison life and other resources that can make research more dynamic, and the ability to forge relationships with interviewees who share the convict label (Frana, 2013; Richards, 2013a; Tietjen, 2013).

While not all of these publications are autoethnographic, several reveal the authors' research interests and how their interactions with the CJS inspired that interest (Frana 2013; Honeywell 2013; Horowitz 2013; Mobley 2013; Richards 2013). There's a shared curiosity about desistance and the role education plays in reentry (Frana, 2013; Honeywell, 2013; Tietjen, 2013). Another commonality is a dissatisfaction with classical criminological perspectives that prescribe crime to moral failings and hail the CJS as a protective factor against further crime without regard for the welfare of those in its custody (Horowitz, 2013; Mobley, 2013; Richards, 2013a). The most prevalent commonality among the FIs featured here is a desire to contribute to change, either to criminology research in general or to the welfare of people whose lives have been similarly disrupted by the criminal justice system (Frana, 2013; Honeywell, 2013; Horowitz, 2013; Richards, 2013a; Tietjen, 2013; Trombley, 2013).

Diverse and unique encounters with the CJS still yield numerous commonalities between these established and aspiring Convict Criminologists. Their pathways to the CC group, educational experiences, and involvement with autoethnography and research are different while still sharing similarities. My hope for this project is to delve deeper into these commonalities and hear more of what these voices have to say.

By conventional standards, a career in academia can be considered a marker of success. For those that have had serious encounters with the CJS, such a career could be considered even more so because of the numerous obstacles that a felonious status produces. I want to explore the realities that CCs are confronted with on their path toward conventional success in academia. When they face situations that are made more difficult by their stigmatized status, how do they deal with it? Which, if any, of the coping mechanisms discussed above are most beneficial or appealing? The purpose of this study is to reveal how Convict Criminologists perceive their

stigmatizing status, how they manage that status, and how their involvement in the Convict Criminology group affects their perceptions and management strategies.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Study Design

I have two research questions for this project. The first is, “How do Convict Criminologists historically and contemporarily perceive and manage stigma related to their criminal history?” The second is, “How has involvement with the Convict Criminology group influenced the way Convict Criminologists perceive and manage their stigma?” For this project, the stigma previously incarcerated people face has been operationalized as material constraints, such as limited access to employment, housing, and education (Uggen & Stewart, 2015). However, it is difficult to operationalize and conduct a deep quantitative analysis on how stigma feels, meaning the internalization of how a stigmatized person believes others perceive them (Bos et al., 2013). In addition to the material and tangible obstacles Convict Criminologists face, I observed how they confronted those experiences emotionally. I want to know how academe, graduate school, and the CC group affects the way they confront that stigma. Additionally, because I seek depth and not breadth in this study, I used qualitative rather than quantitative methods.

Exploring how Convict Criminology impacts the way its members cope with criminal stigma requires a method of investigation that can reveal a deeper understanding of new information (Weiss, 1994). Qualitative interviewing allowed each respondent to share their unique interpretation of their own experiences, providing rich and full insight into their history and its relationship with their current role as Convict Criminologists. Qualitative interviewing also general involves a smaller number of respondents to reconcile the limited time available for transcription and coding, which necessarily means the sample is not completely representative or generalizable (Weiss, 1994). While quantitative methods could have provided more

generalizable answers to my research questions, I wanted a richness and depth of data that would have been impossible with a quantitative research design (Weiss, 1994).

To reiterate, this study inquired about Convict Criminologists' perceptions of their own experiences with stigma, their coping mechanisms to lessen or confront that stigma, and how their status as a Convict Criminologist influences their perceptions and chosen management strategies. When reviewing transcript data, I searched through interviewees' unique stories to find similarities or patterns in their experiences and coping choices. My interpretation of these similarities and patterns was necessarily influenced by the concepts discussed in the literature review.

Recruiting Interviewees

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the coping challenges of Convict Criminologists when presented with criminal stigma and the situations which influence changes in those mechanisms. I interviewed six Convict Criminologists who have who have been convicted of a crime. All interviewees have completed graduate level studies and are engaged in scholarship related to criminal justice studies. Preference was shown for individuals who have attempted to undergo the hiring process for a faculty position at a college or university. Additionally, they also show some form of "membership" with the Convict Criminology field, defined as a connection to the perspective as represented in publications, paper presentations, panel appearances, academic blogging, and/or official membership in the organization.

Since there are no geographic restrictions to who can claim membership in Convict Criminology, there were no such restrictions for recruiting interviewees. I chose to conduct interviews through Zoom, a communication platform handled over the internet, so there were no constraints related to the ability of myself or interviewees to meet in person. Due to the potential

difficulty in procuring a random sample of Convict Criminologists, I used snowball sampling to select interviewees (Warren & Karner, 2005). This was made possible through an initial contact, who is a Convict Criminologist and offered to supply the contact information of his colleagues whom he believed would be interested in this study.

These interviewees were sent an email detailing the goal of the study and a request for a phone call. When a phone call was made, I provided more detail about the purpose of the study, asked for an initial agreement to an interview, and discussed a date and time for the interview. After the phone call, I emailed them a demographic face sheet to fill out and send back to me and confirmed their interview date and time. When a phone call was not possible, all correspondence commenced via email. Their submission of the face sheet indicated their official consent to an interview. Recruitment for interviews began immediately following IRB approval.

Confidentiality

A faculty position at a university necessarily entails a criminal background check and exposure of criminal status to the university. Involvement with Convict Criminology also implies a certain openness a person may have about their involvement with the CJS. I did not, however, assume my interviewees were comfortable with their pasts being on display. I took several steps to honor their confidentiality.

First, respondents were made aware of their ability to withdraw from the study at numerous points during recruitment and during the interview. Participants were informed that all information referencing them, including transcript data and recordings, would be deleted if they chose to withdraw; none withdrew. Second, Zoom storage of video and audio recordings is secure and is not subject to third-party software, which means sensitive data is safe (Archibald et al., 2019). In addition, Zoom video recordings of the interview were deleted after detailed

transcription. Third, aliases were used to refer to the participants in the study upon request. Finally, any identifiable information that was recorded during the course of the interview was automatically deleted from the Zoom auto-transcript, including information like addresses, specific locations, nicknames, university names, or organizations.

Coding

I used a deductive and inductive approach to coding, which was informed by Modified Labeling Theory. I began breaking the data down into discrete parts to examine and compare for similarities and differences as they relate to the concepts previously discussed in the literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This step took place over several reads and re-reads of the transcripts, identifying concepts without expectations that they exactly will match the previous literature. Once concepts were identified, they were grouped into categories based on their similarities. During this process, categories were developed into subcategories. These subcategories answered the “who, what, when, where, how, and why” questions about the main category (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

I coded my transcripts manually, using highlighters and making comments in the margins of physical copies of the transcripts. The initial coding provided a preliminary code book, which was stored as a Word file. During this stage, I also created memos to keep a record of my thoughts, interpretations, and questions from the data. Concurrent coding refined my codebook and assisted in developing concepts and honing them into categories and subcategories.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS, PART I

The Unique Stories of Convict Criminologists

All of the participants for this project had unique, yet sometimes similar, experiences with the so-called criminal justice system (CJS). I have been told stories of cross state extradition, an illegal fundraiser, and accusations of fraud, burglary, and revenge for a bad drug deal. Some participants speak regretfully of the actions that brought them into contact with the CJS, while others are outraged or unsatisfied at the injustice of plea bargaining and the trial process. The majority of people I interviewed for this project experienced several collateral consequences, including difficulty with finding and maintaining housing, prejudice in the job market, and “The Box.” Other consequences included strained or broken social relationships and the constant fear of rejection.

However, as time passed and as they gained footholds in the academic community and established themselves as scholars, teachers and advocates, many participants felt the effects of their criminal record lessen. This is, of course, somewhat dependent on the crime they had been convicted of, where they lived, and the ever-changing context of their daily lives. For example, Jenn, who was convicted of two misdemeanors and had the luck of being under the age of 21 at the time of her crime and conviction, had her criminal record sealed from the public because of her state’s Youthful Offender laws. Zaria, on the other hand, was convicted of a felony when she was 42 and spent a year in a federal camp. After her sentence, she went back to her home state. She was briefly homeless, she was interrogated about her felony at job interviews, she was rejected on applications for faculty positions, and she was even rejected on life insurance applications because of her felony. The circumstances of conviction, including age, location, type of crime, severity of the conviction, and incarceration status, could have some influence

over what kind of consequences someone faces after an encounter with the CJS. This study will not focus on those influences, but it will dive into how each participant experiences those consequences and how they respond to them.

The consequences each participant faced after their conviction were often very different. It's possible each person may perceive their stigma differently as well, especially given the variation in severity between participants' crimes. However, each participant's experience is distinct, and their history with stigma and their perceptions of it are uniquely influenced by their beliefs, motivations, and narratives. To demonstrate these individual struggles and triumphs over stigma, I will briefly share their stories to acquaint the reader with the interviewees' overall experiences with stigma and CJS contact before moving on to the main findings section. For an overview of the self-disclosed demographic make-up of the participants, including race, age, the crime for which they were convicted, time spent incarcerated, and more, please refer to the chart below, also available in Appendix C.

Table 1: Self-Disclosed Demographic Makeup of Participants

	Age	Gender	Race	Conviction	Years in Convict Criminology	Degrees	Occupation	Time Incarcerated
Valarie	36	Female	White	Drug Crimes and Burglary; Felony	8 years	Sociology Doctorate	Tenure-Track Assistant Professor	13 months
Jenn	34	Female	Latina, Mixed-Race	Disorderly Conduct & Possession of a Controlled Substance; Misdemeanor	2 years	Criminology Doctorate	Tenure-Track Assistant Professor	0 years
Jesse	NA	Male	White	Burglary; Felony	Unknown	Criminology Doctorate	Assistant Professor	0 years
Micky	48	Female	White	Fraud; Felony	5 years	Criminal Justice Doctorate	Tenure-Track Assistant Professor	10.5 months
Zaria	48	Female	Black	Conspiracy to Commit Fraud; Felony	3 years	Social Work Doctorate	Senior Associate in Activist	1 year

Lucas	39	Male	White	Sex Crime; Felony	11 years	Criminology Master	Reform Group Adjunct Professor	1 year
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Valarie

Valarie is the child of two university professors that, by her own admission, may have indulged her too much. She was charged with her first felony at 16. Prior to that, she had been involved with more petty crimes, such as misdemeanor drug possession and theft. When she was 16, she and her friends tried to facilitate a drug deal with an older man. The deal went wrong, and Valarie and her friends felt cheated and “ripped off.” To compensate for the money they lost, they went to the man’s home in the middle of the night to steal something valuable. However, unknown to them, the man lived with his mother, who was home the night of the burglary. While Valarie and her friends fled from the house in her friend’s car, the mother wrote down the car’s license plate number and called the police. Valarie and the rest were apprehended soon after.

She has since changed her mind, but at the time, Valarie felt somewhat justified in the burglary. She regretted that the true victim was not their intended target. Still, she had been wronged and the burglary was meant to put things right again. With a Ph.D. in Sociology and a special interest in crime and justice, Valarie understands that there is not always a direct link between legality and morality. She regrets breaking the law because of the consequences she has since faced because of it, but she does not feel ashamed to have done it.

Even though she was young when this incident occurred, Valarie was waived to adult court because of prior charges on her record. She was sentenced to probation on deferred judgment, meaning she would leave this encounter without a felony as long as she successfully completed her probation without any violations. This proved difficult for Valarie because one of the conditions of her probation was to end contact with anyone who had a criminal record. Many

of her friends, including her boyfriend, were enmeshed in the same behaviors she had been and many of them had criminal records. She was caught violating her probation many times and her probation was extended many times as a result. When she was 19, Valarie was arrested and convicted of two new felonies, both of them drug related. Under the advice of her lawyer, Valarie forwent bail and spent three months in various county jails waiting for trial and was then given a new probation term. After yet another violation, her probation was revoked. She ended up spending 13 months in a minimum-to-medium security women's prison.

Valarie had friends with criminal records similar to her own. They had engaged in things such as theft, drug use, drug distribution, and burglary. It wasn't until she was incarcerated that Valarie encountered people who had been involved in more violent crimes, such as assault and murder. She had always thought there was "something inherently different" about someone who committed murder compared to herself. She was surprised and perplexed at the kindness and humanity of two women she became close to in prison who had both been serving life sentences for murder. She was outraged and distraught at the circumstances that lead to their sentences. During our interview, Valarie told me about one of these women, "...if I had the life she had, I would very likely have done what she did, if not something worse and sooner." Valarie, years later, is still friends with both of them.

Prior to her prison sentence, Valarie had completed a BA in Sociology. Once she was out of prison, she had no immediate desire to continue her education. Her priority was to find a job and to find her own place to live while serving her parole. She had a strategy to her job search in which she only applied to places that asked for resumes instead of applications. This way, she could avoid checking "The Box" on applications that ask if the applicant has ever been convicted of a felony. While a criminal background check would provide that answer, by applying to jobs

with her resume, Valarie was able to establish a relationship with her employers and demonstrate her competency before her record came to light. She was able to find both a job and housing fairly easily.

It was a few years later, once she decided to continue her education with a graduate degree, that Valarie encountered housing restrictions related to her felony. Like her initial job search, Valarie was strategic in her graduate school applications. She included her record and prison experience in her personal statements and pled with administrations to consider her. She was accepted to some programs and rejected from others. She will never know if her rejected applications were because of her record or not, but that possibility, the potential that her felony was the reason, was always apparent. Her final choice, a school outside her home state, already had a history of admitting students with felony criminal records. In addition to admissions being unlikely to reject her application based on her felony, Valarie mentioned feeling like the school even valued her experience with prison. She told me, “I felt confident I wouldn’t feel alienated or like I had to hide that I’ve been to prison there. That it was a place that respected that experience.” Once admitted, Valarie was also able to find a job with the school as a teaching and research assistant. However, even with steady employment and good credit, she was unable to find housing for a long time. She encountered blanket policies against accepting applicants who had been convicted of a felony in the last 10 years or against applicants who had been incarcerated in the last 10 years. After many phone calls and help from her father, Valarie was able to find housing and begin her first semester in graduate school.

Even though Valarie chose her school because she thought they would value her experiences from prison and living with a felony, she didn’t actually tell any of her cohort that she had been to prison until they were all graduating. She told them at a celebratory dinner and

was surprised and relieved that they didn't care. She had been concerned about how they would perceive her. Other than her struggles with housing and her fear about her cohort's opinions about her, Valarie didn't share any other experiences she may have had with stigma while in graduate school. She enjoyed her classes and the advice she received from her mentors. When asked if her classes had an impact on how she perceived her experiences with stigma and her contact with the CJS, she told me, "I would relate my experience to what we were reading or what we're talking about pretty clearly and directly. I was able to connect my experience to things we were talking about in class and critique things and readings that we had that were written by people who don't have the experience that I've had." Valarie's direct exposure to the operations of the CJS put her in a position to distinguish between the traditional understanding of why people engage in crime and all that entails, and what she has seen firsthand. While she does see that her experience can provide a unique insight into topics she chooses to research, Valarie stressed to me that she does not center her experience in her research.

When Valarie went on the job market again, this time for a faculty position, she decided to mention her criminal record to her employers up front. However, unlike her personal statements when applying to graduate school programs, its presence in her faculty applications was more subtle. She referenced her status as a formerly incarcerated woman in her teaching philosophy, and she suspects her advisor mentioned it in his reference letters. While Valarie did have to consent to a background check, which she says made her nervous, she once again avoided "The Box." She received four interviews during the several months she was on the job market and her criminal record was very briefly discussed in one of them in relation to her ability to incorporate diversity into her teaching. Valarie told me her record, "...didn't feel like it was a barrier." She is now holding a tenure-track position as an Assistant Professor at one of the

schools for which she interviewed. Similar to her experience with her graduate school applications, though, Valarie will never know why she did not get interviews with institutions that rejected her. When asked about those institutions that might have done so because of her record, she said, "...well if they don't want to hire somebody with a criminal record, then fuck them. I don't want to be there. That's not a welcoming place for me, so it doesn't really matter."

Valarie's involvement with the Convict Criminology group started when she was a Master's student. Her first contact with them at the American Society of Criminology (ASC) conference left her feeling uncomfortable and unsure about her potential place in the group. She, along with every other audience member who had been to prison, were asked to stand up for acknowledgement. She stood, but she didn't like the emphasis the group had seemingly placed on experience. Valarie values herself as an accomplished scholar, and while her experience with prison and the CJS has had a major impact on her life, it is not the driving force of her research. However, she did make friends with members from the group, and she has continued to attend Convict Criminology sessions. She now participates in sessions as a discussant, and she occasionally presents some of her work. While Valarie doesn't consider Convict Criminology to be one of her research areas, she does consider herself to be a part of the Convict Criminology group. They have been a source of comfort for her, and their existence is a signal that she wasn't alone. She told me, "...knowing that I'm part of like a massive number of people with criminal records and that it's not rare and, like, all of those things make it feel less isolating."

I asked Valarie if she feels stigmatized in her current place in life. Her answer was, "Not routinely, but occasionally." She stressed to me that, while she has faced prejudice and discrimination, she does "not [internalize] it as about [her]." She explained that she feels like the population she is a part of—people who have been to prison, who have a felony, who have a

criminal record—are stigmatized, but that situations where she hears prejudiced comments against that population are almost never directed at her. She gave me an example of a conversation she had with an acquaintance about going to Canada. She wasn't sure of the exact legalities of her ability to travel internationally, but she was afraid of possibly being detained at the border. She told her acquaintance that she can't go because she's a felon and their response was, "You don't look like a felon." Valarie told me that she gets defensive in situations like these because such comments are offensive. Depending on the "power and significance" of the interaction, she may choose to "fight those battles," meaning she will discuss how these comments are offensive and should not be used. She clarified that she may let an offensive comment pass during a faculty meeting. But she will "typically" fight that battle if the person making the comment shares her political affiliation and she will "almost always" fight that battle if someone is dehumanizing or villainizing people who committed sex crimes or murder.

Valarie has not internalized her criminal stigma, it appears. Her involvement with crime at a young age and social relationships with other crime-involved people throughout her youth may have given Valarie a more neutral perception of "criminals." Such relationships did not prevent her from forming negative perceptions about certain types of crime, like her former opinion that people who commit murder were inherently different from her. That viewpoint changed after creating strong positive relationships with a person who committed murder. After leaving incarceration, Valarie faced housing discrimination and prejudiced opinions about "felons." Though she had always had a mostly neutral view about people who had been to prison, she knew the general public had a more negative perception of them. She worried about how her friends and colleagues may see her if they knew about her criminal record and hid it for years, which was isolating for her. Finding the Convict Criminology group and making friends

with its members helped her to feel less alone. It also helped her to realize that people with criminal records can still be successful academics. After revealing her criminal history to friends long after meeting them and receiving easy acceptance, she is less worried about how people might perceive her. It does not seem to be a fundamental part of her identity, and she doesn't tell everyone she meets about it. However, instead of debating *if* she should tell someone, she now thinks about *how* and *when* she should "bring it up" with people she wants to know.

Jenn

Jenn grew up in a densely populated urban city, in a social circle where crime was prevalent. All the men in her family have been incarcerated, except for her father, who never got caught. Jenn grew up with gangs and joined one herself when she was fifteen. They were like her family. For her, gang life was very different from the villainous portrayals described in Criminal Justice scholarship. To her, "[her] family members served as like a social control function in the community, and like a social support system." Jenn still strongly disagrees with the academic perception of gangs as "savage" or "animalistic."

When she was nineteen, a member of Jenn's gang was diagnosed with Lupus. She was unable to receive treatment because she didn't have health insurance and wasn't eligible for free state health insurance. To help her pay for treatment, the gang organized a fundraiser by throwing a party and charging people an entrance fee. The venue for the party was rented from the owners legally, but the gang did not have a permit to organize a large gathering. In the very early hours of the morning, the police raided the party. When the police arrived, the party-goers—many of whom were in some manner involved with crime—threw any illegal items on their person onto the floor and fled. Such items included unregistered firearms and drugs. Jenn, along with a few friends that helped organize the fundraiser, were rounded up and arrested.

Jenn and her friends were not told what they were being arrested for, though they asked many times. The scene she described to me was akin to a chain gang, a literal chain running through six pairs of handcuffs while they were marched into a police van. Other than reading their Miranda rights, the police did not speak to them or answer their questions. They were then kept in central bookings for three days, three days in which their questions were still not answered. Nor were they approached by a lawyer or even arraigned. Later, Jenn learned that, under her state's law, an arraignment is supposed to occur within 24 hours of arrest.

After three days, a public defender arrived and spoke to them one at a time. They were each informed that there was a total of thirteen charges against them. These charges included three counts of unlawful possession of a firearm, two counts of possession with intent to distribute, and then a few "catch-all" charges like serving alcohol to a minor, disorderly conduct, and unlawful assembly. All but one of Jenn's friends had no previous criminal record and, in light of that, the public defender tried to convince them to accept a plea bargain. Instead of thirteen various charges, they were encouraged to plead guilty to one felony charge and receive a five-year probation sentence. Jenn told me, "...there's no way I'm going to plead guilty to a felony charge if I didn't do anything." None of them accepted the plea bargain and all of them plead not guilty to the thirteen charges. After twelve days in holding, they were bailed out. Following that was a yearlong legal battle. Jenn and her friends hired their own lawyers and rejected several more plea bargains. Finally, Jenn agreed to plead guilty to two misdemeanors, one count of possession without the intent to distribute and one count of disorderly conduct.

Jenn admits that she was lucky she was only nineteen when she was arrested. While she was too old to be considered a juvenile offender, because she was younger than 21, she was considered a Youthful Offender (YO) and was granted YO status when she was convicted. As

long as she “stayed out of trouble” and was not rearrested before her 21st birthday, her criminal record would be sealed from the public. Jenn did indeed stay out of trouble, her record was sealed, and she has suffered no collateral consequences from her criminal history.

Not encountering collateral consequences did not mean that Jenn didn’t deal with criminal stigma. She said in our interview, “...interestingly, the most discrimination I faced... was in academia.” Jenn finished her undergraduate degree in criminal justice after her conviction and continued her academic career with a master's degree in both policing and criminology. It wasn’t until she entered into her doctoral program that she began experiencing prejudice or discrimination related to her criminal history. She had written about what had happened to her—being in a gang, the party, being in holding, and her plea convictions—in her personal statement for her program application. A faculty member shared Jenn’s personal statement with other faculty members and students. As a result, several people from the cohort above hers were afraid of her and avoided being alone with her. Jenn did not discover this breach of privacy until someone mentioned to her that she, “...was nowhere near as scary as [she] expected [her] to be.”

This type of avoidance and fear in her doctoral program was the first time Jenn had ever felt like she was being treated differently. Previously, Jenn’s social groups included people who had also had contact with the CJS. It was only after entering into a new middle-class institution that she felt stigmatized, not just for her history as a gang member but also for being a woman of color in a predominantly white male institution. Jenn expressed, “...I felt like some of the professors didn’t respect my intelligence. They felt as though I was there because I was like this poor brown kid from the ghetto, and not because I was actually smart enough to have earned my way there.” Jenn initially responded to these situations with anger. However, she realized doing so would justify her classmate’s fear of her. So, she ended up “working twice as hard to kind of

disprove all those myths that they had about [her].” She told me that the discrimination and the alienation she experienced in her Ph.D. program were extremely stressful for her and that, “...those five years were absolutely miserable for [her].” While she had her husband—who also had a criminal record—to vent to, the stress was almost too much. Jenn seriously contemplated dropping out of her program, but ultimately decided to stay and complete her Ph.D.

Jenn started applying for university faculty positions immediately after receiving her doctorate. Because her criminal record was sealed from the public, she never had to “check the Box” about whether or not she had ever been convicted of a crime on her applications. She never mentioned her criminal background to any hiring committees and actively tried to present what she called a “well put together image.” She successfully attained a faculty position only a couple months after her graduation, and she continued to wear a costume that did not truly represent herself. The costume was thorough and convincing, so much so that many of her colleagues were wary of discussing “liberal” topics like the legalization of marijuana and gay marriage because they believed her to be politically conservative. Jenn adheres to more left-leaning and liberal ideologies, but her efforts to hide her criminal past and prove to others that she belonged in the institution as “...a real professor...a real academic...” created a misrepresentation of her true self and her ideals. In our interview, she told me, “... I think I was doing that intentionally to try to cover up my past. I didn't want anyone to...— to...— to judge me based on that. so ... I put on like this front. I didn't talk about my past, I didn't talk about my husband's past, I didn't mention any of it... I [felt] like, for the first few years, I had to be someone else.” Jenn did eventually share her past with two of her colleagues, one of whom had her own brush with the CJS, which made Jenn more comfortable to reveal hers. Jenn feels much more like herself now because she “has met all the standards for tenure.”

Jenn may have kept her record a secret from her colleagues, but she is very open about her membership in the Convict Criminology group. She first encountered Convict Criminology when she was an undergraduate. One of her professors had been wrongfully convicted of a double homicide and he was a member of the group. However, this initial encounter was before she had been arrested and Jenn's perception of CC at the time was that of an exclusive group that was unwelcoming and dismissive to those who had never been convicted. Years later, a friend of Jenn's was discussing with her the lack of diversity in the group and asked her to attend a meeting. She attended the meeting only as a show of support for her friend, but Jenn enjoyed it and has now become heavily involved in the group's equity and inclusion initiatives.

Jenn has only been active with the Convict Criminology group for two and half years. This means she had already completed her education and the beginnings of her academic career without the group's involvement. Other participants have mentioned that they found comfort in the group through the fellowship and camaraderie of spending time with other members and receiving support from them. The time Jenn might have benefited most from that fellowship—her doctorate program—was over by the time she found her place in the CC group. Rather than fellowship, Jenn sees her own membership with the group as a place for scholarship and providing support. She is passionate about structural violence in academia, calling each of her publications a “professional Fuck You to academia.” The Convict Criminology group is a national platform she can use to critique that structural violence through her scholarship. Part of her motivation for pushing equity and inclusion initiatives is to help people who have felony records succeed. She may not have had to navigate collateral consequences from her record, but she did struggle with crime-related prejudice. She mentioned, “I feel like helping other people overcome their stigma and their barriers helps me cope with what was, with what I experienced,

especially in Grad school.” Jenn’s association with the CC group is not a secret, and she is very honest about her membership and involvement with them, even including it on her public Twitter bio. She openly calls herself a Convict Criminologist, saying, “I actually appreciate the shock value that it causes people when they have to you know confront that. That yes, convicts can get Ph.D.s and they can become prominent members of society and they’re not these kind of like demonized broken individuals.”

When I asked Jenn if she feels stigmatized in her life, she said no. She explained, “I think I put so much good into the community that I don’t feel stigmatized at the moment.” For example, she is on her town’s Human Rights Commission, she is in leadership roles in two nonprofit organizations, and she feeds the homeless every Sunday. She’s known in her community for “giving back.” She’s the person to call to bring you gas when you’re on the side of the road and to feed you when you’re hungry. She clarified that, “I feel like I have achieved so much in the past five years that even when people find out about my past, it doesn’t have the same impact because I’ve— I’m known in my community for so many good things, that I think most people would just be genuinely shocked that I have any past at all.”

In addition to using the CC group to both help others with felonies and critique structural violence in academia, and in addition to contributing to her community, Jenn copes with her criminal stigma through her academic achievements. She was initially angry and reactive to the prejudice she faced in graduate school after a faculty member shared her personal statement. Then she tried to hide any indication that she had ever been involved in crime, so much so that she “overcorrected” for that label by presenting an image that had her colleagues with backgrounds fearing she would reject them. Now that Jenn has her doctorate, is well published, and is a university faculty member that is preparing to submit her tenure dossier, she sees her

experiences with the CJS as a source of honor. She's stopped hiding herself. She described this feeling, saying, "I'm not just this person who... who... got a Ph.D. I'm a person who overcame poverty and gang membership and then being arrested and *then* I got a Ph.D. [Participant's emphasis]." Having overcome those hardships and her struggles with belonging and secrecy and being more assured of the permanency of her position, Jenn considers herself to be a "real academic" and a "real professor" who is justly proud of her accomplishments.

Jesse

Jesse had several encounters with the CJS as a minor. None of those encounters resulted in a conviction or any charges, and the arrests have been expunged from his record. As a legal adult, however, Jesse was the primary person of interest in a burglary case. He attempted to join the military during the investigation. He was at basic training for roughly one month when a warrant was issued for his arrest. He was extradited across state lines and taken back to his home state in shackles. Jesse was terrified of receiving a felony conviction. Over the next year, he pleaded with prosecutors to give him anything else, even if it meant a long incarceration. His pleas went unheard, and Jesse received a felony burglary conviction, two years of probation, community service, and had to pay \$12,000 in restitution.

Jesse may not have been incarcerated, but the collateral consequences of a felony conviction have their own traumatic effects. He lost several opportunities after his conviction, including a paid undergraduate internship and, eventually, his job at a large department chain store. He was hired after his arrest but prior to his conviction and did not check the Box. When they ran a second background check on him a year later, they discovered his felony and tried to fire him. Because he had not lied on his application, they couldn't do that. Instead, they pushed him out of his position by giving him fewer and fewer hours. His most troubling material barrier,

though, was with housing. Landlords often took advantage of him. In our interview, he described one scenario where, after a landlord refused to fix something that made the residence unsafe, Jesse went to the city to try and force the landlord into action. Rather than fix the issue as required by the city, the landlord allowed the residence to be condemned, resulting in Jesse becoming temporarily homeless. As Jesse's life became increasingly difficult, his outlook on his future became increasingly bleak. His mental health started declining and he felt "numb, cold, and distant." He looked back on his life and the events leading up to his circumstances, and he came to the conclusion that, "...everywhere [he looked] ...people were just lying so much and [he couldn't] trust anyone..." His conviction planted a seed of distrust and disgust for the CJS, the government, and most people in general. He cut off all of his friends and refused to rely on anyone but his self and his brothers. Jesse retreated from his social circles and chose to focus on school, work, and occasionally dating.

After graduating with his bachelor's degree in Criminology, Jesse couldn't find any work related to his major. His undergraduate professors discovered him working as a dishwasher and encouraged him to apply to graduate school. He did, and Jesse's mental health started to improve in some ways and decline in others. His status as a "felon" started giving him confidence. He had never thought he was smart enough for graduate school. However, not only was he doing well in his classes, but he was even doing better than many of his classmates who didn't have the same conviction related struggles that he'd had. Jesse stopped seeing his felony label as a source of shame and started seeing it as a source of pride. He "wore it like a badge of honor." Jesse still felt very distant and untrusting of others, though, and was reactive and confrontational with the peers in his cohort that made carceral or overly punitive comments about people with felonies. A professor once told him he had a "chip on his shoulder." Unfortunately, while Jesse's confidence

rose with his academic success, he started worrying about his future and the legacy he would leave behind. He adopted a fatalistic prediction of his future and believed that he would die within five years. With this in mind, the legacy he was determined to leave behind after his inevitable death was a Ph.D. and scholarly publications. He told me, "...if I don't ever have a kid or I don't ever get married and no one shows up at my funeral or whatever, at least I had a Ph.D. and got published."

Noticing Jesse's rather morbid beliefs about his own life expectancy, his professors urged him to do a thorough literature review of the Convict Criminology group in an attempt to give Jesse some hope for his future. It did. He told me about his thoughts once he discovered the group, saying, "... I'm like 'Holy shit, there's a lot of these people.' And some of them were more open than others, and some of them did things that were way more extreme than me, right? Like, definitely dealing with a much worse stigma than me." Jesse was initially worried about "fitting in" with the Convict Criminology group. While he had a felony conviction and likely shared many similar experiences pertaining to collateral consequences and general prejudice, he had never been incarcerated. He was unsure if he would be able to make connections with these people. At his first presentation for the group at ASC, he was met with open arms and the words "Welcome home."

Jesse, while not heavily involved with the group at this time, received some mentorship about the academic job market from the CC group. He was presented with two possible strategies for job-searching with a criminal record. First was to not mention it and address his record with a school's Human Resources (HR) department only after receiving a job-offer. The second option was to be very open and upfront about his record to the hiring committee, even before a job-offer. Even though Jesse had gained confidence from his "felon" label in graduate school, he

chose the first option for his approach to the job market. He wanted to be judged “based on [his] own credentials...” and he didn’t want his record to get his application “[thrown] to the bottom of the pile.” Jesse received a job offer without having to reveal his criminal record with the program’s hiring committee. The committee was confused when his paperwork “hit a snag” with HR, but Jesse knew the delay was because they had found his criminal record. They asked a few questions about the incident and Jesse answered, claiming to be “young and dumb” when it happened. The conversation ended on an awkward, but humorous, note when the HR representative asked if they were going to “have any problems” and Jesse responded, “Oh yeah, I just went to school for 10, 15 years just so I could move to [state] and commit more burglaries.” Jesse continued to hide his criminal record from his colleagues after he started working, sometimes resorting to humor to deflect from questions about his past involvement in crime. He finally told one of his colleagues about his background only one week before he left the school for a position at another university. Looking back, Jesse believed he probably didn’t need to be so secretive about his background because he saw many of his coworkers as being just as “anti-conformity” as he was.

During his time teaching, Jesse did something that made his experience with the CJS fairly unique. Without the assistance of lawyers, he petitioned for and received a pardon for his felony conviction. With his juvenile arrest record expunged and his felony pardoned, he no longer had a publicly verifiable criminal background. The traumas of the record would remain, but Jesse would never have to worry about “the Box” again, nor would he encounter any more collateral consequences. Luckily for him, there had never been any articles about his case, so there was no internet record of his background either. It was as if all material traces of his criminal history had disappeared. Jesse was elated about his pardon at first. He is still grateful for

it today. However, the removal of his label as a “felon,” which had given him so much confidence and empowerment, left him feeling like a part of his identity was gone. He had progressed from being angry about his status, to learning to accept it, to being loud and proud about it, to keeping it a secret on the job market, to not having the status at all. Jesse was struck by a profound feeling of loss and the realization that there was now yet another difference between him and his friends in the CC group.

Jesse didn’t discuss those friendships with me, but his strong connection to the group was apparent. He may not ever have been incarcerated, and he may have lost his felon label, but he shared many similar experiences with other group members with criminal backgrounds. He became even more invested and involved with Convict Criminology once it started gaining traction as a potential new division of ASC. He was excited about its growth and was an advocate for keeping the word “convict” inside the group’s title. Jesse does not like the word “convict,” but he believes that the attention this debate has gathered would be better served directed at other issues that could help alleviate the consequences of living with a criminal background. He was very passionate about this topic, fervently exclaiming, “Do they seriously think we give a shit more about [the name of the group] than if you can even allow me to go to school? If I’m even allowed to live on campus? If I’m allowed access to a program? Will anybody even mentor me?” He also believes that people outside of the group, or who have never been impacted by the CJS, should not express their opinion on the title because they don’t understand the hardships of living with that “convict” label.

Like my other interviewees, I asked Jesse if he felt stigmatized in his current position in life. He told me that he does not feel stigmatized for his background because he no longer experiences any of the consequences for having one. He can own a firearm and not show up in a

criminal background check, things which many of his peers can't do. He does, however, feel like his status as a Convict Criminologist is a stigmatized one. He would often feel patronized by other "mainstream" criminologists when the topic of Convict Criminology was discussed. He has seen people without connections to the group roll their eyes and question the group's title. While there are people with backgrounds who have been published in a highly respected journal, *Criminology*, Jesse told me that no one who is publicly affiliated with CC has had the same honor. He also told me that most members of CC or people publicly affiliated with CC do not typically get hired at research universities, and often end up at teaching universities instead. So, while Jesse may not feel like he is stigmatized for his background anymore, he does feel like there is a stigma against his association with the CC group. I asked if he ever felt that stigma personally, and he shared a story where he was treated "like a zoo animal" by a hiring committee after learning about his membership in CC. They asked him multiple questions about his peers, and he felt as if they were more interested in them as a possible study population than they were in his place in their program. It was an uncomfortable feeling and Jesse turned away from them to accept a position at a teaching university. He was hesitant to say with certainty that Convict Criminologists get rejected from research universities out of prejudice. He admitted the possibility that convict criminologists might "aim lower" because they are accustomed to rejection due to their background and apply for positions at universities with a smaller possibility of rejecting them.

Jesse does not feel like he has coped well with his status as a felon, and he admits that he has coped with the loss of that status very poorly. At the beginning of his life with a felony conviction, he lost his trust in people and started retreating from his social life. While his label started empowering him during his time as a graduate student, he had a bleak idea of his future.

That improved when he found the CC group, but even today, he still does not trust people and focuses more on his work and his contribution to the group than on his social life. Jesse's preoccupation with his work stems from his belief that Criminology saved his life. He admitted, "I'm so fixated on the fear of losing it, that I let it run my life." Jesse's struggles with his label, both the way it empowered him and the way its absence has disrupted his identity, has had a negative impact on his mental health. He has already created his desired legacy by earning his Ph.D. and publishing articles in respected journals, but his life is not what he wants it to be and Jesse does not know how to cope with it.

Zaria

Zaria was an established counselor and professor prior to her conviction. She had already completed a bachelor's degree in Sociology and a master's and doctorate degree in Social Work. Due to the crossover between social work and the CJS, she often taught Criminal Justice classes as a part of her school's Social Work program. She also worked as a counselor with young people and minors that had been in contact with the CJS. She was settled in her life and comfortable with her work. Then, when she was 42, Zaria was convicted of a felony for conspiracy to commit insurance fraud and sentenced to one year incarceration in a federal camp.

Zaria told me that she was devastated by her conviction. She was especially worried about how it would affect her daughter, who was in middle school at the time. While Zaria was incarcerated, her father took care of her daughter. She worked in the camp's library, making \$8 a week, which was not enough to pay for privileges like writing utensils, snacks, and hygiene products. Zaria was close with her father, and he financially supported her in prison. Sadly, he was diagnosed with brain cancer during the year she was inside and died a year after she returned home.

When I asked Zaria to describe some of her experiences in prison, the first thing she told me was, "...prison is not for women." She explained that she and the other women in the camp had to wear men's clothes, men's shoes, there were only pads for feminine hygiene, and there were no products she could purchase to take care of her hair. There were no products for black women's hair at all. She felt like their basic human needs were not being met, mentioning that they sometimes consumed food that was labeled "not for human consumption." She felt as if she and the others imprisoned there with her weren't considered people. She said, "...we were a number. We were names that I don't use, very dehumanizing labels were put on us. And we were really stripped, in a lot of ways, of our identity." One of the ways Zaria coped with her experiences in the camp were through the prison chapel. She became an usher and a worship leader. She called it her "saving grace" and a "transformative time in [her] life." Participating and leading in Chapel had a strong impact on her, and Zaria is now attending Seminary out of a desire to provide both service and support for people who have been through the system.

Before her own run in with the CJS, when she was still working as a counselor, Zaria's perception of prisoners was rather negative. She believed that people who were in prison obviously deserved to be there, otherwise they wouldn't be in prison. She had a lot of trust in the system to do what was right. As she started working more with juvenile "delinquents" who were being impacted by the system, she started realizing the system was imperfect. The young people she counseled were often poor and their crimes were related to feeding themselves or hungry siblings. Her perception changed completely once she had her own contact with the CJS. She said, "... it wasn't until I got to the prison and I started meeting people, you know, and hearing their stories that I was like 'Wow, this is a messed up system.'" Zaria was struck by the criminal justice system's inability and unwillingness to help the people it was criminalizing, such as

treatment and assistance for drug addictions and food insecurity. She realized her previous beliefs about so-called criminals were completely wrong because she hadn't done any of the things she thought "criminals" did. At the beginning of her conviction and incarceration, Zaria thought about her mistreatment and often asked herself, "Why is this happening to me?" During her incarceration, where she met and heard the stories of so many people in similar circumstances, she began to understand, "No, this is happening to *us*. [Participant's emphasis]." She lost all faith she had previously had in the system.

When Zaria came home, she started experiencing the discrimination and prejudices that are so familiar to people who have been convicted of a felony. Her credit card company cancelled her card, regardless of her excellent credit. She had a very difficult time securing life insurance. She could no longer do a pre-check at the airport, something that is completely unrelated to the nature of her felony. She applied to many jobs and had to check "The Box" several times. In her first job interview following her return home, the first question Zaria was asked was about her criminal record. She was shocked that this question took precedence over her work experience or reasons for applying. It was after this particular incident that she decided, "[she] will never let someone be in charge of [her] narrative again." I asked Zaria how she felt about these situations and how she handled them. She told me that she was angry, and she was hurt and frustrated. She would wonder why there were so many restrictions on her life now. She mentioned, "I just felt like... I've done my time, you know. Like, when can I— When will forgiveness happen? And I realized it never happens. People are... some people are just never forgiving." One thing Zaria did in response to these situations was to write about it on her Facebook page. She feels that the majority of people don't know what kind of lives people with felonies have and what kind of barriers they face. She wants to share her experiences with the

people she knows so that they can be aware of these situations. In addition to Facebook posts, Zaria also continued to speak to people who were still incarcerated. She said that having those conversations helped to keep her grounded by reminding her that she was “on the other side of it.”

Zaria faced a lot of difficulty finding a job, but one of the more frustrating attempts on the job market were for university faculty positions. She currently does occasional guest speaking at universities, but she has been unable to obtain a faculty position as a direct consequence of her conviction. All of her job applications have been in an online format, and the technology of the applications simply disallows her to complete them. On two occasions, after Zaria clicked “Yes” on the question asking about criminal convictions, she was kicked out of the application. On another occasion, a form letter explaining that her application had been declined populated on the screen as soon as she checked The Box. On another two occasions, she was prompted to answer five additional pages of questions regarding her conviction and the circumstances leading up to it. It was a horrible and disheartening experience. Zaria told me about her disappointment with the applications, saying, “...those websites, the algorithms are set up so that it's like, as soon as you click that box, you get eliminated. So, it doesn't even go to HR. Like, no matter, even if you finish the application, it still doesn't make it to HR.”

Zaria misses teaching. She facilitates classes as a part of her current job with The Pretrial Institute. It’s not the same, though, according to Zaria. As a professor, she could build relationships with students and was able to see their growth through their years in the program. She wants to get back into academia. A potential reason for her inability to find work as a professor could be where she is applying. Zaria lives in a state which has 1,630 collateral consequences for felonies according to the National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of

Conviction (*Collateral Consequences Inventory / National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Criminal Conviction*, n.d.). The states surrounding hers all have less than 900 consequences. Zaria's friends out of state have encouraged her to move to their various states so that it would be easier for her to find work in academia. She is currently looking into applying for online opportunities to teach that would not require her to move. Otherwise, Zaria has started trying to foster relationships with people that have connections to universities. She hopes that by letting people get to know her, she will have an opportunity to demonstrate her interest, skill, and passion for teaching without immediately going through another online application. Zaria dreads having to check The Box again. It has become an almost traumatizing experience for her. She told me, "I don't feel like even going through this again. It's traumatic right. Like, to have to re-explain over and over and over. And that's how I felt just looking at the Box." Zaria looked into applying to three different Seminary schools. Two of them had The Box in their applications and she "just cringed." She chose not to complete the applications and is now attending a Seminary school that is social justice focused and did not include questions about her background in their application.

One of the ways Zaria is able to stay connected to academia is through the Convict Criminology group. She was introduced to the group through a friend, and she reached out to them with questions about what they did and how they operated. After hearing they were a part of ASC, she decided to attend one of those meetings. She was unimpressed and "very disgusted" with some of the presentations she attended. That didn't stop her from getting more involved with the group, though. The following year, she and a friend co-presented on issues researchers should consider when doing research on people who have been impacted by the CJS. One of these issues was using humanizing language in research. Zaria seemed passionate about

humanizing language in our interview, and I asked for her opinion on the name of the group, Convict Criminology, which other interviewees consider dehumanizing language. While she doesn't like the name, she also doesn't want to exert too much of her energy on changing it, especially when it already causes so much division between group members and there hasn't been a new name put forward to replace it. Zaria, as a member of the board for the CC group, would rather direct her energy to her other goals. She wants to be able to reach out to more students and influence policy to make secondary education more accessible to people who have been impacted by the system. She also wants to bring more diversity to the group. The CC group has, historically, been comprised of primarily white men. Zaria wants to make sure that all groups are represented within the group moving forward. Her contribution to the group is not a traditional one, such as scholarship and academic research, but it is a vital part of the group's operation.

Given Zaria's various encounters with collateral consequences, it would be easy to feel constantly stigmatized. When I asked her if she did feel stigmatized, her answer was, "In some spaces, not most." She felt stigmatized in other divisions of ASC, as if she were uncomfortable and unwelcome because of her background. She quickly discovered that people in those spaces who had criminal records hid them. That wasn't the case in the CC group. For Zaria, it's a space that welcomes people with convictions. She doesn't have to worry about barriers and stigma there because she knows that there are other people in the room who also have a background. She doesn't feel like there are people looking at her wondering what she did to get her conviction. Within the group, Zaria was allowed to just be somebody interested in helping others and serving in "the work." It's a safe space for her. Outside of ASC, she still feels stigmatized in certain situations, such as when she applies for work positions. She is also repeatedly confronted

with people's negative assumptions about formerly incarcerated people. While she used to respond to people's prejudice with confusion, frustration, and she was always afraid of being rejected. She would wonder why people stopped treating her like a person. Now, she leads with confidence. Her conviction is a part of who she is and the work she does. She told me, "I own my experience. And so people...can't really have control over you when you control yourself." Zaria will frequently introduce herself as formerly incarcerated. Or she lets people get to know her and then reveals her background shortly after, which shocks many of her acquaintances. Zaria enjoys doing this because she believes it could help eliminate some of the stigma around formerly incarcerated people. She knows that she doesn't fit into the stereotype most people have about "felons" and she believes breaking people's assumptions is a step toward diminishing the stigma.

Zaria knows that stigma doesn't go away. Stigma "still exists because it's in people's heads. It's not me, it's them." It will always be there, and she won't always be able to correct people's assumptions, especially when their only contact with her is through an online employment application. What she can do is be in control of her response to stigma. She has gained confidence and ownership over her experience, and she is very open and honest about her background. Stigma is not a constant presence in her life, but when it shows up, she can respond to it if and how she wants to.

Micky

Before she had any personal contact with the CJS, Micky was an activist. She had completed her undergraduate degree in Sociology and Women's Studies and then completed a law degree. Given her law degree, I was surprised to hear her say she did not have any particular interest in crime and justice studies until years later, after her own run in with the CJS. She told

me that she saw the criminal justice community as a broken one. She didn't want to use her law degree to be a prosecutor because she didn't want to be a part of letting a defendant's race or financial status lead them to worse criminal prosecution. She also didn't want to be a defense attorney because she didn't want to be involved with letting violent offenders go without proper punishment. "Both sides looked really undesirable to me," she said. As a compromise, she used her law degree in non-profit work and activism. Here, Micky had a chance to help people without getting involved with a system she saw as too broken.

Unfortunately, it was around this time Micky realized she was struggling with a gambling addiction. Micky's addiction began when she was 21 and when she was in her mid-30s, she was terminated from her position as a nonprofit organizer because of issues around financial mismanagement connected to her gambling addiction. It was four years later that Micky was indicted for wire fraud related to these issues. It was during these four years that Micky started to understand the defense side of the criminal justice community that she had previously been so against. She explained to me, "People have a story, there's more to a crime than just one story..." While Micky did have a chance to speak to the judge and share her story at her own trial, she had been completely overwhelmed by the experience and feels as though the words she said barely made any sense to the people in the courtroom. She feels like there wasn't a true opportunity to really tell her story.

Micky moved back in with her mother during the four-year period between her termination and indictment. Her relationship with her mother had always been somewhat strained. However, as Micky began addressing her addiction and her new circumstances, she wanted to rebuild their relationship. Her mother is now a "huge cheerleader" for her. More so than her mother, though, the support she received from Gambler's Anonymous (GA) was

instrumental to both her recovery from her addiction and her peace of mind while dealing with her trial and incarceration.

The prosecutor in Micky's case pushed hard for a five-year sentence. On one hand, she was told that "they were going to throw the book at [her]" because she had been in a position of authority in the nonprofit world, and her actions had hurt a lot of people. On the other hand, Micky's attorney told her that she was unlikely to see any prison time because she had taken so many steps to better herself. Micky expected to get probation or home confinement. The first thing the judge said at her sentencing was, "Why has it taken so long for this case to be prosecuted? Why is it taking so long for the victims to see justice?" Micky's hope for a light sentence were dashed. She pled guilty and left the courtroom with a sentence of one year and a day in a federal prison camp.

Micky didn't go to a federal prison camp, though. She has a health condition and the only prison in the state that could accommodate her was a medium to high security facility that housed violent offenders. Micky didn't share her experiences in prison with me, except that she "tried to forge relationships with everybody that [she] could," while keeping herself safe. She spent just over ten months there, before being placed in a halfway house. After that, she was confined to her home for one month and then spent two years on probation.

I asked Micky about her experiences with collateral consequences or prejudice after her incarceration. Related to her education, she had actually attended a Ph.D. program for two years before her indictment but was expelled when she was incarcerated. After her home confinement, Micky tried again to apply to a graduate program. She was honest about her record and pled her case to her current school, and they admitted her to their Master program in Criminal Justice. Within her first year there, she was accused of plagiarism. Someone else in a group project was

the real plagiarist, but Micky's professor blamed her for it instead. That professor knew about her felony, and she believes his quick judgments about her stemmed directly from some preconceived idea about "felons." Fortunately, Micky proved her innocence and didn't suffer any long-term consequences from the accusation. In addition to her experiences in school, Micky has been denied housing because of her felony. She was honest about her felony on her applications, and she doesn't know if her rejected applications were the result of a background check or if the property managers rejected her as soon as they saw her answer to the Box. Micky was also fired from both Uber and Lyft after a year of working for them because they discovered her felony after conducting a federal background check, which they did not do when she initially applied.

Micky was introduced to the Convict Criminology group while she was a Master's student. She found them by accident at an ASC conference. She responded to what she believed was an offensive comment someone had said about why there weren't many female Convict Criminologists at the time. She told the group that she was a woman with a criminal record, and she had had no idea the group even existed and wondered if the group was actually a welcoming environment for everyone. She was approached and encouraged to join the group after the talk ended and she has been a part of them since that first encounter. She said in our interview, "...Convict Criminology became like a community for me almost immediately. Which I really needed."

When Micky's Ph.D. program was nearing an end, her involvement with the group helped her stay positive while she applied to faculty positions. Before applying, she sought out advice from two other Convict Criminologists that had recently gone through the same process. They told her, "You're not being considered for what you did, you're being considered for what you can do..." In addition to their advice, Micky actually received some hope for her job

prospects from previous research she and her colleagues from the CC group had done. They had interviewed people with criminal records on the academic job market and several of them were successful in finding jobs. Her biggest fear at the time was to get a Ph.D. and then never be hired. With the advice of her friends and research to back it up, Micky felt like the road she was on wasn't a dead end.

Micky sent out about 17 applications. Regarding "the Box," she had to "answer the question 'yes' on many applications." She's not sure how many of those places automatically rejected her because of that. She told me, "There's this reluctance the minute I see 'Do you have a felony?' And then you have to explain it. It kind of can—just stops me in my tracks and I'm like, 'Oh, here we go again.'" Later in our interview, we discussed the Box again, and Micky shared her opinion that, "...people should at least be able to be considered for a job before [a criminal record] becomes relevant." While frustrated and weary at answering yes to the Box so many times, she didn't let its presence on an application prevent her from applying anywhere.

She got several initial interviews, which she says surprised her. She had not realized that the hiring committee often only receives a candidate's curriculum vitae and references while the school receives the application. Only after someone is under consideration for the position does the school more closely examine the application. Micky became the candidate of interest at a school she really liked. It was only then that she told the chair of the program she had a felony. The chair's initial response was that it "didn't matter." Still, for Micky, "...it was real nerve-racking saying it." Two weeks later, Micky received a text from the chair saying, "Just so you know, your story is yours to tell." Things looked like they would go well from there. Micky filled out her hiring paperwork and she even signed a contract. Then she received a message from the school that they need more information to understand the circumstances of her felony.

Micky was incredulous and scared. She had already told her friends and family that she had been hired. She was nervous that she “[could] lose all of this.” She sent the school a couple paragraphs explaining what happened and waited for two days to hear back from them. Her fear of losing it all was understandable, but fortunately, her worries were settled. The school cleared her for work, and she began teaching soon after.

Micky has experienced prejudice from a professor and her judge as well as collateral consequences such as housing discrimination and job loss. But much of Micky’s experiences with stigma dealt with uncertainty, especially on the academic job market. She described it to me as, “...a stigma I carry with me. I feel like there’s an F on my forehead for ‘felon’ and that I never know when it’s going to kind of rear its ugly head.” When she experiences that uncertainty about her criminal record, that it may or may not have been the cause of some negative outcome in her life, Micky reaches out to other Convict Criminologists. She feels like they can understand what she’s going through because “[they’ve] all faced it.” There are certainly a variety of levels of contact with the CJS beyond having a felony and many members of the CC group have even had no contact with it. But when it comes to fellowship, Micky believes,

...there is a bond that forms among the people who have faced criminal charges—not everybody’s been incarcerated but who have been involved in some way with the criminal justice system—because we need that support in a different kind of way. It’s not just about the research, it’s about the fellowship and the support we can provide and the mentorship.

Just like she wanted and needed fellowship around her gambling history prior to her indictment, Micky wants and needs fellowship from people that understand the barriers to success she faces from her criminal record. She mentioned that she found her niche, that she

“had people to have meals with and do things with and to support.” Micky stressed to me that support, both receiving it and providing it, were a huge part of her relationship with the CC group. She believes in “paying it forward,” so when she receives support it becomes her job to support others who are facing similar experiences and help them find their own success.

Towards the end of our interview, I asked Micky if she ever felt stigmatized and if she feels stigmatized now. She told me that she goes through “waves” of stigma. During her trial, she felt it a lot. Her judge told her that she should leave school, that no one would hire her, that she didn’t deserve it. When she was dismissed from her Ph.D. program, she started to internalize that belief and felt like she would never be able to achieve anything. She told me that “it’s imposter syndrome to the nth degree when you also have a felony.” That despair of never being successful started to lessen more as she found Convict Criminology and then even more when she started her new Ph.D. program. She felt it again while on the academic job market because she thought her record would be a huge barrier. But with support from the CC group and GA and previous research, she persevered. Now that she’s completed her Ph.D. program and she has a faculty position, she feels like she has overcome those barriers and that the judge was wrong. She is the least stigmatized she’s ever felt. She explained, “...I think, as you gain the success, as you travel through the different academic spaces and you’re successful, the stigma lessens.”

Micky explains that she’s grateful that the stigma comes in waves, that she still occasionally feels it, because it acts a reminder of the consequences of her history. To her, her stigma is as much a ramification of her gambling as it is a ramification of her criminal record, and she doesn’t want to forget that.

Lucas

Lucas Dietsche has likely faced the most collateral consequences and the most prejudice and discrimination among all the participants for this project. He has been evicted from his home, refused entry into academic spaces, rejected from activist groups, and suffered the defamation of his character by strangers and colleagues alike. I asked all participants the question, “Do you feel stigmatized?” While most of them replied that they sometimes feel stigmatized depending on the context of the situation, Lucas was the only one to answer with an emphatic, “Absolutely.” The difference between his answer and the others is likely because of the difference in their convictions. Until now, the stories I’ve shared have been centered around crimes like burglary, fraud, and drug possession. Lucas was convicted of a felony sex offense and his experiences with stigma have been dramatically different.

Lucas did not share much about his home life except to say that his family is still together, and he is close with his siblings. He began his undergraduate degree in History when he was in his early twenties at a university six hours away from home. Lucas has anxiety, depression, and a personality disorder, but he had not yet been diagnosed as an undergraduate. He felt very isolated while at college. During this time, when he was 24, Lucas was convicted of a felony sex offense for talking to a fourteen-year-old girl in a chat room. This crime did not technically have a “true victim,” however. The girl Lucas thought he was talking to was actually an undercover police officer participating in a sting operation. His initial sentence was for three months on a monitor and then one year incarcerated. Lucas ended up spending two years incarcerated and then spent another several years on probation.

He did not provide many details about his experiences while incarcerated, but Lucas shared many anecdotes about his experience with probation. As a person with a sex offense on

their record, Lucas' probation was very strict. He was required to introduce any overnight guests to his probation officer (PO). Because he lived with his parents at the time, this restriction essentially put them on probation as well. In addition to overnight guests, he also had to introduce potential dating partners to his PO before they could date. While on a date, Lucas had to have a chaperone. He tried dating once, but he described it as a "very restrictive [way] of being with someone." He eventually decided to wait until after his probation was over to try dating again.

Another restriction Lucas faced was avoiding anything that went against his treatment provider, such as talking to other people with criminal backgrounds. To confirm if he was following the terms of his probation, he was occasionally polygraphed. This put Lucas in a very difficult situation. While incarcerated, he had sought out guidance on how to live his life with a sex offense. In doing so, he was recommended to contact a member of the Convict Criminology group. Lucas established a mentorship with the group member he wrote to, but he had to be very careful about how he interacted with this mentor during his probation. Lucas was allowed to have a relationship with this person as long as his PO knew about him. Lucas' PO did not approve of his mentor, seeing him as "...a usurper of like people to like kind of continue in their deviancy." He saw Lucas' mentor as someone that used research to excuse crime and propagate deviancy.

It was Lucas' Convict Criminology mentor that encouraged him to finish his undergraduate degree in History and then pursue a master's degree in Criminology. He saw even more probationary restrictions while trying to complete his undergraduate degree. Because his offense was related to computers, Lucas was prohibited from using certain kinds of technology such as computers and cell phones. He did not share with me how he navigated this constraint,

though he did tell me it was “very vexing.” Lucas received his bachelor’s degree and, four years later, was finally accepted into a Criminal Justice Master’s program. Finding a graduate program was difficult for him. At some point over that four-year gap, a school replied to Lucas’ application with a note, saying it was “uncouth” for someone like him to try and pursue a master’s degree.

Once admitted to his program, Lucas was open about his criminal record and carceral experience to his professors because he felt like he had to be. His cohort and classmates were often former police officers, probation officers, social workers, or soldiers. Lucas viewed the majority of them as having a “carceral frame of mind.” His own background was very different from theirs, both from having a criminal background and from having been a published author in poetry and various academic topics. Because of that difference, he would sometimes “get kind of catty” in class when he saw a discrepancy in what he was being taught or what his classmates believed when compared to his own experience or knowledge. He wanted his professors to know why he was so reactive to his classmates, so they were aware that he had a record and had some experience with incarceration. Lucas was slightly disappointed with his time as a Master’s student. He didn’t feel appreciated in his program, and he wasn’t taught how to write academically, which was something he had a strong desire to learn.

While in his Master’s program, Lucas had already started searching for ways he could continue to be successful in spite of this record. He did a lot of “groundwork” to prepare for his academic job search during this time. Like many other participants have mentioned, there were two routes he could have taken when applying for faculty positions. He could have been “sneaky” about his criminal record and say nothing while his CV lists topics that blatantly imply some involvement with the prison system. Lucas decided to take the second route and tell people

that he was formerly incarcerated, but nothing more. He also looked into teaching through correspondence programs to avoid moving and subsequently reregistering in a new place on the sex offender registry. He was able to start a conversation with a hiring official from a top correspondence program and make a good impression. Lucas hadn't finished his classes yet at the time, and the hiring official told him he had a job waiting for him when he did and to send over his CV after his graduation. The hiring official followed through, and Lucas began teaching the semester following his graduation.

Lucas had always been active in activist groups, and he tried to continue being a presence in these spaces after his incarceration and over the course of his education. Unfortunately, these spaces were no longer very welcoming to him. He described an incident from last year as his "last big upset." Lucas is a member of Save the Kids, a grass-roots organization dedicated to ending youth incarceration and the school to prison pipeline (*About / Save the Kids*, n.d.). His role in the group is in incarceration support and dealing with letters from prisoners and does not actually interact with any minors. He was also an organizer promoting solidarity for social justice groups in the wake of George Floyd's death. Someone doubted Lucas' appropriateness for the role, questioning if someone who had been incarcerated should handle the organizing. This brought more attention to his criminal record and spurred a discussion about his presence in the group. What followed were accusations that he should have been more open about his criminal history and insinuations of misconduct that Lucas called "borderline libel."

Lucas' relationship with activism has soured since his conviction. He tried to navigate it as much as he could by telling only people who needed to know about his background. The information would eventually spread to others, however, and a "super backlash" would ensue. Lucas told me, "I was like mobbed by the Facebook masses again with my background. Like,

how am I supposed to keep on you know moving forward with this if I'm always like trounced?" He called activism a "nonprofit industrial complex" that claims to want him—or at least people like him—to heal but has also "written him off."

There have been several incidents like these since Lucas' conviction. Feminist spaces in particular were against him working there and were also against an award he won. He was cast out of a criminal justice activist group for supposedly "not taking his [work] seriously." He was advised by these groups to inform more people about his crime and to do so early in his involvement with these groups. Groups that have a history of helping people with backgrounds were "going crazy" and "projecting" onto him. He mentioned, "I understand it's horrible, it is a toxic thing, but like to say that what I did to you... Like I have nothing to do with what happened to you, like that's insane." He was being treated as if he had personally victimized the people in these groups. Lucas has since stopped participating in local activism. A local rally for Earth Day was scheduled for shortly after our interview and Lucas was, at the time, afraid to go because, "...what if someone freaks out and like says something?"

One of the ways Lucas copes with situations like these is to get "revenge." While his colleagues in the Convict Criminology group often use the word empowerment to describe the "[drive] to overcome this stuff,"— "this stuff" being prejudice and discrimination—, Lucas calls it getting "interpersonal community revenge." Lucas' form of revenge is publishing highly acclaimed scholarly work. By doing so, he wants to prove that he isn't what he was a long time ago. Unfortunately, he knows that publications won't be enough to make others believe he has changed. He knows that people are "always going to have these thoughts." He started to explain that if he could "publish enough, then—" Lucas couldn't quite articulate what would happen if he published enough, though he insisted that he wants to focus on his accomplishments as his

“revenge” instead of convincing others to change their minds about him. He continued to say that he’s not trying to “win the graces” of the groups that rejected him with his publications, and that he doesn’t want to be reminded of his past because there’s “nothing to be gained anymore.”

What Lucas wants, more than prejudiced strangers’ acceptance, is to put the past behind him.

He may want to put the past behind him, but Lucas also wants to surround himself with people that understand what he’s going through. He found those people with the Convict Criminology group. Lucas sought out Convict Criminology under the advisement of a friend because he believed that all other avenues for success were closed to him because of his conviction. He mentioned that if he had been convicted of a lesser crime, he may not have sought them out at all. Lucas’ mentor invited him to attend an ASC conference one year after his probation ended, when he no longer had to avoid other people with criminal backgrounds to comply with his treatment provider. He was invited to “come out” to the CC group members and share his conviction with them. Afterwards, he was introduced to a few members, and he was struck by the thought, “Oh my God, these are all my peers.” He has attended the ASC conference every year since then and has even been approached to contribute to round tables and give presentations. He feels valued and wanted in this space. He has made friends there that he can “just hang out” with. The CC group has been like a “guiding light” for him, and he is glad to have people he can confide in who share similar kinds of experiences to the ones he’s had.

Even amongst peers that should be empathetic to his circumstances, Lucas still faces prejudice. Compared to other convictions in the group, Lucas told me that a person with a sex offense is considered “the lowest of the low,” while, “people that are drug dealers are almost seen as gods.” Another group member of CC responded to something he posted on Twitter, calling him, “nothing but a pedophile,” and questioning his motives for being involved in the

Save the Kids organization. Still, Lucas values the camaraderie he has found with Convict Criminology and at least partially credits this community for some of his accomplishments. One of his greatest accomplishments is his position as an adjunct professor, teaching correspondence courses. For him, this level of success is his “cornerstone... one thing no one can take away from [him], no matter what has happened.” Lucas is incredibly—and rightfully—proud of himself and the achievements he has fought for. He has found a community where his intelligence and contributions are valued, not just in spite of his past, but somewhat because of it and his ability to overcome it.

Having shared these stories, I believe it is apparent that, though they are uniquely nuanced, participants’ experiences with stigma have many similarities. Valarie, Jenn, Micky, Zaria, and Lucas all have a positive and hopeful outlook on their future. Jesse and Jenn grappled with finding their identity and its connection to their criminal statuses. Though their experiences had different outcomes, both Micky and Zaria struggled with “the Box.” While Jesse, Lucas, and Micky have found a great amount of personal comfort, friendship, support, and even validation within the Convict Criminology group, Valarie, Jenn, and Zaria have benefited from the group in other ways.

With the basic biographies and summaries of my interviewees’ CJS contacts as a foundation, the follow section examines these experiences directly through the literature previously reviewed and from data-emergent themes as they relate the research questions. How do participants perceive and manage their own stigma and how does the Convict Criminology group impact those perceptions and management strategies?

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, PART II

The purpose of my first research question, “How do Convict Criminologists historically and contemporarily perceive and manage stigma related to their criminal history?” is to understand how participants’ perceptions and views of their stigma may have changed compared to when they first started living with it. Many of the people I interviewed already had some kind of negative belief or opinion about so-called “criminals” before they ever had direct contact with the CJS. Perhaps because of those beliefs and the general negative perception of those with convictions or who have been incarcerated, they expected society to reject them or devalue them. They believed their opportunities for work, education, and companionship could be diminished and their lives could become restricted in some way. The frequent devaluation of their personhood and rejection from opportunities caused many of them to feel angry and disappointed. To cope with their newfound criminal stigma, they would engage in several defense mechanisms. Among these early coping strategies were reducing the possibility of rejections through withdrawal and secrecy, and obtaining comfort through social support, proving self-worth, and trying to reduce the stigma.

Perceiving Stigma: Expecting, Experiencing, and Reacting to Rejection

Expecting Rejection

The first step in the process of stigmatization from Link et al.’s Modified Labeling Theory is the conceptualization of a stigmatized status in a community (Link et al., 1989). This means how the general population comes to perceive a stigmatized status, and if that status is devalued in some way. A criminal status is generally understood to be a negative one by those who do not have that status and even by those who do. Micky and Zaria both expressed negative beliefs about so-called “criminals” prior to their personal contact with the CJS. Micky refused to

use her law degree to “get violent offenders off” and Zaria grew up believing that, “...if a person is in jail or prison, they must have did it, right?” Even Valarie, who was involved with crime at a young age and did not see “criminals” in a negative light because of that, believed that there was “something inherently different” between her and people who engaged in violent crime.

If an individual does *not* see a criminal status as inherently negative, that individual may still be aware that most others in the general population do. This is the case for the majority of participants, who expressed an awareness that other people had negative opinions and “unkind thoughts” and assumptions about people with criminal records or people who had been to prison. Zaria was vocal about this awareness, saying, “Like, they think everybody who has a conviction, like, went out and slaughtered a whole family or something, you know.” Jesse believes most people lack the empathy needed to understand that people with records or incarcerated people are still human and that, “...America, the public in general, just want to forget about people in prison.” This awareness, however, came only after participants had begun living with their new statuses.

The general population’s perception of what it means to have a stigmatized label—or at least the awareness of what the general population’s perception is— should mean that once someone from the general population receives that label, that person then *expects* to be devalued or discriminated against in some way (Link et al., 1989). Some of the people I interviewed, however, seemed to not connect the general negative opinion of “criminals” to themselves until after they started experiencing some level of rejection or discrimination. Indeed, Valarie was genuinely surprised the first time she became aware that her felony was causing a barrier in her life. On the other end of the spectrum, Lucas was so concerned with the many future rejections he was sure he would encounter that he sought advice for how to navigate them before he even

left the prison system. These expectations became reality for everyone through prejudice, discrimination, and collateral consequences.

Experiencing Rejection

I will provide several examples of the public reactions that participants experienced, starting with common collateral consequences. Many of the collateral consequences they have faced began with “the Box.” On applications for jobs, housing, and schools, there is often a question about an applicant’s criminal history. By answering that question honestly and voluntarily revealing their connection to the CJS, many participants were denied jobs, housing, and even insurance. Even if an application does not ask about criminal history, the easy availability of background checks and internet stories about crime could mean that an employer or decision-maker knows about a person’s criminal background.

Difficulty maintaining housing was the most common consequence among participants. Zaria was briefly homeless directly following her return from prison, though she did not provide details about the circumstances of her homelessness. Micky was denied housing while getting her Ph.D., though she is unsure if she was denied because a background check found her felony or if she was automatically denied because she answered honestly about her felony on the applications. Valarie was also denied housing because of blanket policies against people with felony convictions or who had been incarcerated. Jesse struggled with convincing people to rent to him and was frequently taken advantage of by landlords who were aware of his desperate need for a place to live. Like Zaria, he was homeless for a short time following an incident where his landlord allowed his home to be condemned rather than do repairs on the house.

Following their incarceration, Valarie, Micky, and Lucas lived with family members. Though neither of them verbalized the exact reason for this, it’s possible that it was easier for

Micky and Lucas to stay with their parents than risk constant rejection on the housing market. Valarie openly admitted that she chose to live with her uncle in a new state rather than the state where she had previously paroled because she believed her uncle's state's POs would treat her better. After moving out of her uncle's apartment, Valarie actually didn't experience any housing-related roadblocks until she moved to a new state for school. Micky eventually ventured out to find her own place to live as well, meeting roadblocks along the way, but Lucas stayed with his parents longer. With a felony sex offense on his record, Lucas would be required to put his name on the sex-offender registry every time he moved. He wanted to avoid re-registering as much as possible and possibly stayed with his parents longer because of that. More recently, Lucas had been living in a socialist commune, but was evicted because they discovered the details of this criminal record.

Finding or keeping employment was another difficulty some participants faced, though not all of them. Valarie applied for work through resumes to avoid applications with "the Box," but she did consent to background checks. When she was hired as an administrative assistant at a wine and cheese warehouse, she assumed her employers found nothing from her background check or they didn't do the check at all. Later, she discovered that her employers did find her criminal record and hired her anyway. Jenn, whose record was sealed and who was not convicted of a felony, told her boss about her arrest and charges after being released from her brief containment. She believes doing so changed their relationship for the worse, and she left soon after accepting her plea deal.

Lucas', Micky's, Zaria's, and Jesse's work were more directly impacted by their criminal record. Lucas found work at a cheese factory after his incarceration, and they were obliging to the restrictions of his probation. Outside of his official employment, Lucas's record was not very

difficult to find and his colleagues in the social justice and activist communities he frequented often discovered it without his knowledge. Though he tried his best to make positive contributions to these groups, Lucas was constantly criticized and berated for his past. His character and competency were called into question, and he was more often than not pushed out of these activist circles. Micky was fired from her position at the nonprofit where she worked, and she had to resign her bar license when she was indicted. While she was able to obtain a graduate assistantship with her master program, she also worked for both Lyft and Uber to support herself. Both companies conducted state background checks when she was hired, and they did not find her felony record. She was fired from both companies after working for them for over a year because they eventually found her record through a federal background check. Zaria lost her positions as a juvenile counselor and social worker when she was convicted. In her first job interview following her return home from prison, the first question she was asked was about her criminal record. She was constantly rejected from work opportunities until she found a position at the Pretrial Justice Institute. More recently, Zarai has been unable to find a teaching position at a university as a direct result of her criminal record. Twice, the technology used for the online applications she was instructed to use populated a rejection notice as soon as she indicated she had been convicted of a felony. Jesse, after his arrest and before his conviction, was hired to work at a large department chain store. As pointed out in Part I of the findings, they discovered his felony record and tried to fire him for lying on his application. When they were unsuccessful, they reduced his hours and essentially “pushed him out” of his position. After that, he “couldn’t get anyone to give [him] a job.” He was eventually hired as a dishwasher at a restaurant, a job he believed he was overqualified for given his level of education.

Many participants desired to continue their education after their convictions. Everyone who desired to do so was successful in finding a school to admit them, but some faced more difficulties than others. Jesse was accepted into every program where he applied. Jenn had no public record and therefore little criminal record- related trouble getting into her school, though she did include her history of gang affiliation in her personal statement. Valarie also included her criminal record in her personal statement. She was admitted to a fraction of the schools she applied to, and she'll never know if the schools that rejected her did so because of her record or not. She chose to go to a school she believed would respect her experience because it was referred to her by a formerly incarcerated colleague that enjoyed his time in the program. Micky actually entered into a doctoral program after the investigation into her case started, but before her indictment. She was in the program for two years before her conviction. The judge over her case told her that she should quit school and that she wasn't deserving of it. Micky was formally dismissed from the program once she was incarcerated. Micky fought her way back into school once her home confinement was over and was quickly admitted into a Master's and then a Doctoral program. It took four years for Lucas to be admitted into a Master program. As mentioned in the previous section, over the course of that time, one program responded to his application, telling him it was "uncouth" for someone with his record to try to get a master's degree. Lucas was eventually admitted to a program online.

There are other various examples of prejudice and discrimination participants experienced. Recall from part one of the findings section that Jenn, who had no public criminal record, had the contents of her personal statement shared to students by a faculty member in her program. Several people in her cohort knew that she had previously been affiliated with a gang and that she had been to jail. People she went to class with were afraid of being in the same room

as her and avoided her because they thought she was “scary.” It was only after getting to know her that some of her cohort stopped being afraid of her. Micky was wrongfully accused of plagiarism by a professor who knew about her criminal record. The assignment was a group project, and it was actually another group member that plagiarized. Her professor would not believe that she was innocent. Micky eventually proved her innocence, and her academic record was not negatively impacted by the accusation. Zaria was denied life insurance and her credit card was cancelled because of her felony. Jesse has been rejected from romantic opportunities because of his criminal record. Valarie has been accused of being a danger to her boyfriend’s child after the child’s mother discovered her criminal record. Valarie has also been a part of conversations that demean people who have been to prison because the people around her don’t realize she is a part of the group they’re demeaning. Lucas has been the subject of several negative and pointed comments about his crime. All participants have experienced some form of rejection since receiving their convictions, from civil state collateral consequences to general prejudice and discrimination.

Reacting to Rejection

Rejection hurts. The emotional responses to being devalued the way these participants have can vary, but they were often feelings such as anger, disappointment, frustration, and sadness. Lucas, bombarded by constant negative reactions to his conviction in several spaces, started feeling tired very quickly. He was angry and exhausted by the frequent reminders of his past. He described his experience as “heartbreaking,” because he was often afraid that people around him, especially in social activist spaces, would have a bad reaction to his presence there.

Zaria was incredibly frustrated with the restrictions and discriminations she experienced. She told me that she was hurt and angry that her life had become so limited by her criminal

record. She often wondered why her crime resulted in what she saw as unrelated discrimination, such as not being allowed to go through a TSA pre-check at the airport. Such musings led her to the realization that she and others like her—people who have been to prison, who have felonies, who have a criminal record—will likely never receive forgiveness from the rest of society.

Micky shared Zaria's anger and frustration. She also shared Lucas' exhaustion, though hers was related to her frequent encounters with "the Box." Unlike Zaria and Lucas, Micky believes the consequences of her crime and conviction are intrinsically linked to her gambling addiction, and the stigma she faces acts as a reminder to "not make bad choices." While she was angry, sad, and hurt, she also felt that she was fortunate her situation was not as bad as it could have been if she had been convicted of a different crime.

Jesse's emotional response to the many discriminations he faced was anger. He was angry at the world for his mistreatment and was especially frustrated at receiving rejections to job applications for which he was overqualified. He was disappointed in the rest of society for not being empathetic enough to care about him and people like him. He described his emotional state in the months following his conviction as "cold, numb, and distant." Jesse was, and is, full of negative emotions surrounding his criminal status—and current lack thereof—but one of his most prominent ones was anger at his circumstances and wariness about getting "fucked over" by the people around him. Jenn was also angry and distrustful. Though there was no public record that could be used against her, gossip and rumors that she was in a gang and had been to jail spread in her Ph.D. program and she was afraid of her cohort's judgment. She was "miserable" and "uncomfortable" because she felt like she would never belong to this new middle-class institution. Jenn felt as if she couldn't "be herself" around her peers or they would be afraid of her and judge her for her past.

Valarie's emotional response to her new stigmatized status was interesting. Valarie was genuinely shocked when she encountered her first record-related barrier, difficulty finding housing. She was surprised and distressed that something "from so long ago" was affecting her current life. She did not share with me that she was often angry, disappointed, or even sad about her circumstances because she avoided situations where her record could cause a limitation. Most of Valarie's anger, when it occurred, was not directed at her own circumstances but at people who displayed general prejudice against the whole population of people with records or who have been to prison.

Participants' range of emotional responses to experiencing criminal stigma following their conviction was not wide. All of them felt some level of anger, and many were frustrated and sad about their circumstances. Exhaustion, distress, or sadness at frequent rejections were common. While Valarie barely felt personally stigmatized, Jesse, Zaria, Jenn, Micky, and Lucas dealt with a lot of negative emotions during this time of their lives. In situations like these, where stigma is the cause of negative emotions, many people may try to reduce or eliminate these emotions through coping mechanisms (Link et al., 1989). All participants have tried to cope with the stress of stigma or have preferred methods of managing the stigma they experience. I will explore these strategies in the next section.

It is important to note that many of these negative emotions were very impactful to participants earlier in their stigmatized lives. After years of experience, their more current perception of their stigma is somewhat different than their initial ones. I will review these and the impact the Convict Criminology group may have had on them in a later section.

Managing Stigma: Reducing Rejections or Processing Them

In my literature review, I reviewed the three coping strategies from Modified Labeling Theory (Link et al., 1989). These behaviors, thought to be used to avoid rejection, are secrecy, withdrawal, and preventative telling. Secrecy entails keeping a stigmatized status secret from others, withdrawal means limiting social interactions to only those who already know or who accept a person's stigmatized status, and preventative telling involves educating the general population about people with the stigmatized status in hopes of changing negative attitudes towards the stigmatized (Link et al., 1989). In addition to Modified Labeling Theory, I also explored how social support might be beneficial to coping with stigma. Over the course of our interviews, participants disclosed various behaviors they used to navigate their experiences with stigma. Some behaviors are reminiscent of the three strategies from Modified Labeling Theory, and some are very clearly intended to seek support from social circles. There are also behaviors and strategies that are outside these methods. Participants tended to cope with their stigma through two primary methods. First was to avoid or limit situations where they could be rejected, often doing so through secrecy and withdrawal. The second was to find comfort through the rejection through seeking support, proving their self-worth, and trying to reduce the stigma of a criminal status. Notably, none of the participants limited themselves to a single coping strategy but employed multiple methods in different situations throughout the years.

Reducing Personal Rejections

As seen from the previous section, rejection caused by criminal stigma inspires many negative emotions in people. One way participants coped with this stigma was to reduce the likelihood of experiencing personal rejections. By personal, I mean any rejections that affected interviewees directly, rather than rejections aimed towards the general population of people with

criminal records, formerly incarcerated people, or people with felonies. There were two avenues towards reducing rejections. The first avenue was through withdrawal, and the second was through secrecy.

Withdrawal

Three participants started using withdrawal as a form of coping soon after their convictions, though how they employed the method differed. Jesse, who, during our interview, perhaps displayed the most negative emotions regarding his new circumstances, withdrew from the majority of his social circles. Believing others to be less empathetic than himself, and afraid he would be “fucked over” if he left himself vulnerable, he isolated himself. He worked, he spent time with his family, and he finished his classes. Even when he went back to school and his status as a “felon” became a source of confidence, he still did not socialize with others as much as he did. In more recent years, Jesse is still a self-proclaimed “workaholic,” who focuses most of his time on his work in the Convict Criminology group.

Lucas also withdrew from many social interactions directly following his incarceration. However, his withdrawal was a byproduct of his probation rather than a decision to limit his social network. He disclosed in our interview that his only social interactions after coming home from prison were often limited to his coworkers while at work. Many of those coworkers already knew at least some of his background because his probation occasionally required his absence from work. Many of Lucas’ current social relationships are those he formed in the CC group, and they share several aspects of his own carceral and stigmatized experiences.

Valarie did not isolate herself the same way Jesse did or how Lucas was forced to do. While she never felt particularly affected by her new status, she was still afraid of being rejected for it. She withdrew, not from all or even most social situations like Jesse did, but only from

those where she thought rejection likely. For example, when Valarie chose which Ph.D. program to attend, she chose the one that had a history of accepting students with felonies. She believed that she would be, not only accepted, but respected for her background in this program, and chose it over other programs that might have had better financial packages. I believe this is a form of withdrawal. Valarie may not have limited her social interactions as completely as Jesse, but she did choose to attend a school where her criminal status would not be a barrier to her over other schools where her background *could* have been a barrier. Lucas also limited his options in a similar way by seeking out a teaching position at a correspondence school rather than applying to multiple positions like other participants. By doing so, he would be able to teach while not needing to move and reregister on the sex offender registry.

Secrecy

Many participants expressed that while they didn't share their criminal background with people, they also didn't make overt efforts to hide it. For the purpose of this thesis, I am defining secrecy as the conscious decision to not share information about a criminal background out of fear of rejection from another person. With this definition, four participants used secrecy to cope with their new stigmatized statuses following their conviction and/or incarceration.

Lucas, with a felony offense that has more stigma than many others, may have had the most to hide from others. However, it was also more difficult for him to hide his background because of both state and national sex offender registries. In his professional life, Lucas tried to keep his background a secret from his colleagues in social activist circles, but it was eventually revealed regardless of his efforts. Given the numerous negative reactions from those colleagues, it is not surprising that Lucas also kept his background a secret from his classmates during his

education. While he did tell his professors that he had been previously incarcerated to explain why he was often reactive in class, he kept the details of his offense private.

Valarie was only somewhat secretive about her background. If she thought she might experience a rejection because of it, she intentionally hid it. For example, she told me she was afraid of how her cohort in her Master's program might react if they knew she'd been to prison and so she kept it a secret from them until the last week of their last semester. More recently, after seeing that her colleagues and friends were accepting of her background and didn't see her in a negative light because of it, she has started to think about how she can reveal it to more people in her life.

Jesse and Jenn were the most secretive among the participants, especially on the job market. While Jesse found his felon label to be a source of empowerment and confidence during school, he soon realized it would not benefit him to boast about his criminal record to academic hiring committees. He decided to keep his record a secret as much as he could. With one exception, he did not mention it in interviews, and he did not mention it to his new colleagues and coworkers once he was hired. When he was asked about why he was so interested in deviance, he would deflect the question with flippant humor about being a juvenile delinquent when he was young. Like Valarie, he only revealed his criminal record to a coworker a week before he left his position for a new one. Now that he has received a pardon for his offense, he is even more secretive about his background.

Jenn, whose cohort was scared of her when they realized she'd been involved with a gang, decided to do everything she could to keep her background a secret. When she went on the job market, she created a new "well put-together image" for herself, one that she believed portrayed aspects of a successful academic. She continued to present this image, one that her

colleagues saw as politically conservative, even after she was hired and had accepted a teaching position. These settings were the only ones Jenn explicitly revealed to me that displays intentional secrecy. However, she also told me that her neighbors and living community “would just be genuinely shocked that [she] had any past at all,” implying that she has kept her background a secret from them as well. Contrary to these displays of secrecy, Jenn is currently working on an autoethnography that will reveal her status to anyone who reads it. She told me she is only comfortable doing so now because she is confident she will receive tenure before its publication.

Both withdrawal and secrecy are attempts at preventing the experience of rejection. Through withdrawal, people with criminal stigma ward off the negative emotions that follow rejection related to their status by limiting their interactions to those that are unlikely to reject them outright for their criminal background. Lucas was absent from many of his previous social circles, though this was somewhat a circumstance of his probation. Jesse intentionally isolated himself from his previous social circles. Valarie chose to attend a school where a criminal background could be respected. Each of these involved choosing to engage in interactions where secrecy about a criminal background was unnecessary, either because there was little to no interaction due to isolation or because the people engaged in the interactions already knew and/or respected the person’s background. When interaction was necessary and respect was not a guarantee, some participants chose to utilize secrecy to prevent experiencing rejection. For Jesse, Jenn, Lucas, and Valarie, secrecy felt necessary because rejection felt unavoidable. Lucas and Jenn had experienced enough rejection from previous encounters to believe future rejection was inevitable. Valarie did not want to be hurt by her associates and colleagues and Jesse was constantly expecting to be “fucked over.” The most logical course of action for them in these

situations was to simply not tell people about their background if it was not necessary. These tactics do not always work, however, and rejection was often inescapable for some participants. When they could not prevent it from happening, participants engaged in different coping mechanisms to find comfort after being rejected and to deal with being the subject of prejudice.

Finding Comfort Through Rejection

Sometimes experiencing rejection due to a criminal status is unavoidable. At the very least, the prejudice against a criminal status ensures that the possibility of being rejected is constant. It is often difficult to discern if a rejection was a result of the criminal status or something unrelated, as we have seen from Valarie and Micky. If it is impossible to completely escape the effects of their criminal background, how do people cope with the stigma?

Participants coped with it by finding sources of comfort, such as social support, proving their self-worth, and trying to reduce the stigma as a whole.

Social Support

Recall from the literature review that social support can be either expressive or instrumental (Cullen, 1994). Support is expressive when it helps someone meet an emotional need and instrumental when it is used to achieve a material goal. All participants have found comfort through social support in some capacity. Micky initially had the Gamblers Anonymous group to help her meet her emotional needs, and they have supported her since before her incarceration. Her family was also a significant source of support for her. She has since added the CC group to her sources of comfort, finding friends among the other CC members. She told me that when she faces discriminatory or prejudiced situations, she reaches out to other Convict Criminologists to share her feelings about it because they've faced the same situations and they understand her feelings. In addition to his family, Lucas has also found comfort through his

friendships inside the CC group. Through them, he has found people that he can have inside jokes with and who know about his background, but don't degrade or think less of him for it.

On the instrumental side of social support, some participants benefitted from their family, colleagues, and the CC group in more material ways. Zaria received financial support from her father while incarcerated. Valarie's uncle allowed her to live with him while she looked for a job. Both Valarie and Jesse sought out advice from mentors or other faculty while on the job market. Mentorship and providing advice were a large part of the official support Valarie, Jesse, and Lucas received from the CC group. While Valarie did not like some of the advice she received from the group, it was a springboard for her to seek out advice from criminologists with criminal records who were not a part of Convict Criminology. Meanwhile, Jesse and Lucas both enjoyed the mentorship they received. Notably, one aspect of instrumental support, providing advice, can be a method of finding comfort from prejudiced situations *and* preventing rejections.

Receiving social support was a huge source of comfort for some participants. In addition to receiving it, Valarie, Micky, and Jenn mentioned that providing support was another way for them to cope with their stigma. Seeing as she did not like the advice she received from the CC group, Valarie wants to be a source of contrasting advice for young Convict Criminologists. Micky enjoys being able to provide emotional support to others and to give the same emotional support and understanding that she receives. Jenn feels the same way, saying "I feel like helping other people overcome their stigma and their barriers helps me cope with what was, with what I experienced." In all of its facets, social support provided some level of either material or emotional comfort to each of the study participants.

Self-Worth and Pride

Another method I saw some participants use to find comfort through living with criminal stigma was making an effort to increase their feelings of self-worth or doing something to feel proud of themselves. Academia provided an excellent platform to accomplish this, though it is not the only one. Lucas was oriented toward publications even before graduate school, through newspaper and poetry publications. Once he had the opportunity to continue his education, he started publishing scholarly pieces sometimes related to his own stigmatic experiences with the activist community. While discussing publishing, he mentioned, “I’ve done a lot of things to pull me through and... and everything. I’m doing things on a national scale. Um, those are ways of coping.” His publications and academic presentations are a way for him to prove to others that he is successful in spite of his background and to remind himself that he does not need their approval or acceptance.

Recall Jesse’s story and how he started to associate his legacy with his education and ability to publish academic pieces. Though he implied that this association was an unhealthy one, it was still something he felt was necessary for the actualization of his self-worth in the face of his stigmatic experiences. Jenn’s story was similar, believing that she must do whatever was necessary, including drastically changing her public image, to become a “real academic.” Now that she meets the standards for tenure, an example of a highly regarded academic accomplishment, Jenn feels more capable of revealing her background to her colleagues. She does not need to fear rejection because, as a soon-to-be-tenured professor, she does not need anyone else’s approval anymore.

Interestingly, there is a common theme among many participants in how their academic accomplishments have impacted them. Their accomplishments are like a reminder that they are

worthy of the accolades they have received and the positions they are in. It has also had the effect of decreasing the stigmatized “feeling” they have. I will provide more detail on this in a later section.

Reducing the Stigma

By reducing the stigma, I mean any effort with the intent or effect of changing the general population’s perception about people with a criminal status. For example, preventative telling is a coping method that attempts to reduce the stigma of a particular status by educating people about the real circumstances of the status. Only Zaria used this coping mechanism. Zaria frequently, both directly after her conviction and incarceration and more recently, posts about her experiences with stigma on Facebook. She does so with the express intent of educating her followers about the plights of people with felonies. She said, “...when I deal with these kinds of situations, I post them on my Facebook because I feel like a lot of people don’t know that this is happening. So, I like to make people aware.”

Valarie also engages in behaviors that potentially change people’s assumptions about so-called “criminals.” Whenever Valarie hears derogatory comments about people with criminal records or people who have been to prison, she is quick to correct whatever false assumptions she hears. She is able to do this because, like Zaria, she realizes she does not fit the assumption most people have about people who have been to prison. Because others are comfortable expressing their perceptions in front of someone whom they believe shares that perception, Valarie has ample opportunities to correct them.

Zaria also enjoys “surprising” people with her criminal status. She establishes a relationship with a person and then she “drops it on them that [she’s] formerly incarcerated.” She believes doing so can eliminate at least some stigma because she knows that she does not fit the

assumption most people have about formerly incarcerated people. By doing this, she hopes that she is changing people's assumptions. Jenn also engages in a similar behavior, though it is different from Zaria's method of coping. Jenn has made herself known in her community as an altruist and for always being willing to help. She genuinely does feel a sense of duty to her community. But these good deeds also act as a protective factor against rejection. Jenn told me in our interview, "I feel like I have achieved so much in the past five years that even when people find out about my past, it doesn't have the same impact..." While Zaria intentionally reveals her background with the intention of breaking assumptions, Jenn still keeps hers a secret while hoping that her reputation will protect her if her community finds out about it.

Micky, Jenn, Jesse, Zaria, Lucas, and Valarie all cope with their stigma in both similar and different ways. Social support seems to be the most common one, though there are some differences between enjoying the expressive support from emotional relationships and the instrumental support from benefactors and organizations. Increasing self-worth helped Lucas, Jesse, and Jenn feel worthy of their achievements and like they have moved past the desire for acceptance from those that previously rejected them. Finally, Zaria and Valarie are independently reducing the stigma of a criminal status by correcting the inaccurate assumptions that they are confronted with so frequently. No one has stuck to a single coping mechanism for all life's situations and many of them have changed how they cope as the years go by and as their experiences with stigma and its prejudices change.

The next section will cover my second research question, regarding the impact the Convict Criminology group may have had on participants' perceptions of their stigma and their management strategies.

The Convict Criminology Group and its Impact on Perceptions and Management

Recall from the literature review, the Convict Criminology group's mission is to "[create] an academic space for formerly incarcerated academics' voices to be heard, critically [examine] the massive social inequalities present in the current American criminal justice system, and [formulate] progressive/rehabilitative correctional policy" (Tietjen 2013:3). Micky, Lucas, and Jesse have their own ideas about the purpose of the group. For Jesse, the research aspect of it is "basically critical criminology, with a focus on corrections and reentry." To Lucas, "[it] studies the POV and the perception of people that were there [prison or some other negative contact with the CJS]." For Micky, being a part of the CC group, "means you believe in telling the story of those who face the consequences of the criminal justice system and telling it from their point of view, not just an outsider's point of view."

The research aspect of the Division of Convict Criminology is an important one, but there is also a social facet of it. Interaction between members can spark camaraderie, friendships, and mentorships and can create academic partnerships for publications. Indeed, networking and mentoring across career phases in academe can be critically important to career success (Lunsford et al., 2017). My second research question addresses the impact being a part of this group may have had on members' perceptions of criminal stigma and coping mechanisms. Given the opportunities for interaction between members, the mentorship aspect of the group, the ability to collaborate for publications, and many more features of the group, I believed it would be likely that the group had some impact on participants' perceptions and management strategies. After conducting six in-depth interviews, I found that group membership has had some impact on management strategies whereby the CC group acts as an apparatus for providing support, the opportunity to support others, and a platform to establish self-worth. The group also had some

impact on changes in perception, primarily through its existence providing evidence of success for academics with criminal backgrounds.

The Convict Criminology Group as an Apparatus for Coping

Many participants' coping mechanisms started to involve the CC group once they established a relationship and presence in the group. As stated in the previous section, the CC group provided both expressive and instrumental social support to some participants. It was a source of emotional connection and understanding, a platform for assistance with publications, and an instrument for receiving advice about how to succeed in academia. While it provided support, it also provided the opportunity for participants to give their expressive and instrumental support to others. Increasing their self-worth was a stigma management strategy for Jesse, Jenn, and Lucas and it was primarily implemented through achieving academic success. Doing so can potentially decrease the "feeling" of being stigmatized. According to Micky, "...as you gain the success, as you travel through the different academic spaces and you're successful, that stigma lessons." Access to that success was assisted by the instrumental support of the CC group through mentorship and advice and through providing a platform for presenting research to the Criminology community.

There was only one person I interviewed whose coping strategies seemed to be unimpacted by their involvement in the CC group. Zaria's primary coping method was to reduce the stigma of a criminal background by subverting the assumptions of the people around her through Facebook posts and "surprising" people with her criminal background. Both of these actions are irrelevant inside the CC group because its members either have a criminal background or are likely to be supportive of those who do. While there is still the potential for receiving expressive or instrumental support from the group, Zaria did not disclose whether or

not she received these benefits. Interestingly, Zaria mentioned in our interview that she doesn't know who has a conviction in the group, saying, "Honestly, we don't even talk about our charges. Like, that doesn't come up, at all." Other participants indicated some level of knowledge about other group members' criminal statuses, which leads me to believe that Zaria did not receive or provide expressive social support within the CC group.

Overall, the Convict Criminology group did have an impact on stigma management, though it was small and did not necessarily cause participants to change coping strategies. While the group did provide expressive support, it did so for participants that already sought out social support prior to their involvement with the group. It provided instrumental support through mentorship, but mentorship is common throughout academia, and it is likely participants would have received it outside of the group as well. For example, Valarie did not like the advice and mentorship she received inside the group and purposely sought out advice from people outside of it. I believe the coping strategies where the CC group played the most prominent role was in increasing self-worth and giving opportunities to provide support. By increasing self-worth through academic success, such as publications and presentations, the CC group can play a small or large role in assisting that process through its mentorship and the platform for presenting research that it provides. For participants who cope by providing support to others who have been through similar experiences as themselves, the CC group offers a large pool of such people who may be in need of support.

The Convict Criminology Group as Evidence of Success

Before interviews were conducted, I operationalized perceptions of criminal stigma as feelings related to being rejected because of that status. The rejections ranged from collateral consequences to interpersonal rejections and the emotional responses to those situations ranged

from exhaustion to frustration to disappointment. Participants' perceptions of their status—the expectation of being rejected because of it and the emotional response after that happens—did change over time. Some of them started to expect rejection less after experiencing acceptance from people who could have rejected them. Others simply stopped thinking about their status as a negative aspect of themselves and saw it as a source of pride for overcoming so many hardships and achieving success. I believe this change in perception was indirectly impacted by membership in the Convict Criminology group.

When asked if they still feel stigmatized, most participants indicated that they only feel stigmatized occasionally and only in certain situations. Valarie feels stigmatized when she experiences interpersonal prejudice, but otherwise does not feel personally targeted by the general population's negative opinions of "criminals." She sees her background as an occasional barrier, but not something to inspire personal shame. Being involved with the CC group does not seem to have had any impact on her perceptions of her stigma, except for its mere existence giving her hope that she can succeed even with her background.

Micky and Zaria feel stigmatized when they believe their criminal status could be a potential barrier to success. Like Valarie, the CC group gave Micky hope for being successful. As she gained academic success, she felt less and less stigmatized by her criminal background because it felt less and less like a barrier. The stigma still comes "in waves," especially when she is worried about potential rejection, but the stigma is overall less than it was before she achieved her academic successes. The CC group became a safe space for Zaria. It did not necessarily help her to achieve success, but it did provide an environment where she didn't feel stigmatized. Outside of the group, she is aware that people's opinions about her and people like her are generally negative. Inside the group, she doesn't have to worry about what other people think of

her criminal background because she's not the only one there with one. She doesn't have to worry about people's negative judgements inside the CC group, and she can focus on other things.

Jenn was the only participant that said "no" when I asked her if she currently felt stigmatized. She explained that she felt like she had put "so much good" into her community, that she believed people would never think she had a criminal record and would be shocked that she did. I believe that Jenn sees the good deeds she has done in her community as a protection against stigma and her community's potential rejection of her. By doing good deeds, she is less likely to be rejected by the recipients of those deeds. She has made herself the opposite of the general population's stereotype of "criminal" and has protected herself against feeling stigmatized for it. The CC group gives Jenn the opportunity to do good deeds through the support she wants to give to young Convict Criminologists. However, while the good deeds she can do through the group do act as a coping mechanism against stigma, I do not believe Jenn's membership in the group has had a large impact on her perception of stigma. The people she can help inside the CC group are not people that would be expected to reject her for her criminal status because they are likely to have their own criminal status. Her good deeds within the group are not likely to protect her from rejection because the recipients of those good deeds are not likely to reject her, meaning the CC group has had little impact on her changed perception of her stigma.

Like Jenn, Jesse also claims that he does not feel stigmatized for his criminal status anymore. However, he believes that he is incapable of feeling criminal stigma because of his pardon, indicating that he links criminal stigma with collateral consequences rather than criminal experiences or experiences with the CJS. Prior to his pardon, the CC group had helped him feel

hopeful to achieve the same success older members of the group had achieved, similar to Valarie and Micky. After he received his pardon, Jesse appeared to feel almost guilty for having rights returned to him while his friends with convictions in the group were still denied those rights. All the negative emotions he had felt because of his criminal status were untethered to a source and Jesse struggled with his identity and relationship to Convict Criminology. He began to feel as if he were being stigmatized for his involvement in the CC group due to the reactions he received after revealing his status as a Convict Criminologist. While the group helped him feel less stigmatized for one status, it also became a source of a new stigma for Jesse, prompting the largest change in perception of personal stigma among all participants.

Lucas was the only participant that does still feel that he is generally stigmatized, due to the larger stigma against sex crimes. Unlike other participants, the CC group has been active in Lucas' journey with criminal stigma since his incarceration. Recall that Lucas sought out the group for advice on how to live and succeed with a felony early in his imprisonment. They have been a source of support for coping as well as a source of hope. Lucas *does* feel stigmatized, even inside the CC group. However, he still feels proud of himself and his accomplishments, and the CC group played a part in helping him achieve those accomplishments. As an adjunct professor, he has reached his "cornerstone" of success and the pride he feels over that achievement protects him against some of the stigma he still feels from his criminal status.

The Convict Criminology group's impact on participants' perceptions of their stigma was mostly indirect when it made any impact at all. The most direct impact I saw on any changes in perception has been through its assistance in achieving success, as was the case for Micky, Valarie, Jesse, and Lucas. Another direct impact was through creating a new stigmatizing status for Jesse. The CC group made an indirect impact on perceptions by giving participants hope that

they could achieve success in spite of their criminal status. The CC group has a long history of successful members and acted as evidence that academic achievements were within reach for people with criminal backgrounds. Each of the four interviewees above mentioned feeling more hopeful for their own success after learning about the CC group. It helped them feel less alone and like they were not completely barred from the accomplishments they wanted to achieve. Not only did it give them hope, but it also provided the resources for success through its mentorship and platform for presentations and feedback. Lucas gives at least partial credit for his “cornerstone accomplishment” of being an adjunct professor to his membership in the CC group. While mostly indirect, the Convict Criminology group has had an impact on changing some participants’ perceptions of their stigmatized status.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

This project has reached the goals of shedding light on some of the struggles FI individuals and people with convictions go through when they decide or continue to take the academic career track. The purpose of this project was to explore how Convict Criminologists perceive and manage their criminal stigma and how their membership in the CC group impacted those perceptions and management strategies. My findings, though not generalizable, indicate that being involved with the Convict Criminology group does have an impact on its members' coping with criminal stigma. It provides its members with support and the opportunity to support others. Though small, the group also had an impact on the participants' perceptions of their stigma through giving group members hope for a successful future. Each of these participants' stories contributes to the literature on Convict Criminology, social support, stigma management, and under-researched challenges in the pursuit of graduate degrees and employment in higher education. As individual histories, the experiences of these group members add nuance to what is currently known about academics who are a part of the CC group.

This project was, of course, limited by its qualitative and exploratory nature as well as my own inexperience. The small number of participants limits the generalizability of the findings, though the breadth of information from each participant was rich. The participants were also not selected randomly, but through an initial contact that recruited people based on participant interest in the project. Interviewing people with convictions in academia but outside of the CC group could have added validity to the findings by making comparisons between perceptions and coping strategies between the two groups. Finally, as a novice researcher, I likely did not probe participants for as much data as I could have if I had been more experienced at the time of the interviews.

Additional research is clearly needed to better understand the challenges faced by those with significant criminal justice contact and how they cope with criminal stigma. Future exploratory studies may benefit from conducting interviews outside the CC group to make comparisons between coping, changes in coping over time and the life course, and to highlight the impact the CC group has on its members. Furthermore, quantitative research could possibly generate generalizable results and provide information on the benefits of membership in the Convict Criminology group. While this study did not focus on gender, race, and/or ethnicity and their relationship to stigma perception and management, some of the data collected suggests that experiences could be gendered, and therefore could be an interesting line of additional research in the future. Many participants, though not all of them, displayed positive self-perceptions as an indirect result of their involvement in the group. If this is a common trait among its member, the CC group could use this and future research to advocate for itself and recruit more members. Future research should also examine criminal stigma management and the CC group's functionality from an intersectional perspective, as criminal stigma can be exacerbated by membership in subjugated group categories. More specifically, scholars might consider examining the intersecting roles of race, ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual identity, and age with criminal stigma.

This project has shed additional light on the struggles of people with convictions pursuing and finding careers in academia. Particularly, the struggles with The Box on employment applications and experiencing rejection from peers was a common issue for many participants. It's my hope that readers will take into consideration the dedication and drive that is required to pursue an academic career while managing these struggles. One of the coping methods participants used to manage their stigma was to inform others about their status to

lessen that stigma. This project will hopefully serve a similar purpose. Sharing Jesse's, Jenn's, Valarie's, Zaria's, Lucas's, and Micky's stories, both their struggles and triumphs, highlights their humanity, and makes them more tangible and real to the reader. As Zaria mentioned in her interview, "Until we start treating people like human beings again, the stigma connected to having a criminal record will continue to exist. It will continue to have a negative impact on how people live and function in their everyday lives." Like Zaria, I want this project to assist in subverting the assumptions and opinions the general public have about people with convictions and do its part in lessening the stigma of a criminal record.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Questions

- a. How do Convict Criminologists historically and contemporarily perceive and manage stigma related to their criminal history?
- b. How has involvement with the Convict Criminology group influenced the way Convict Criminologists perceive and manage their stigma?

Interview Questions

SEGEMENT 1

Introductions and Participant Rights: Prior to recording the Zoom video, I will introduce myself, talk a little bit about the purpose of the study, and remind participants about their right to not answer any questions and to end the interview at any time. Recording will begin with the first question below.

1. “Hi, thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I’m really excited to be talking with you. To start us off, can you tell me a little bit about yourself? I’d really like to hear about your career and your experiences with academia.”
 - a. What I’m looking for: What made them want to be in academia, type of institution for their education and instruction, type of degree, programs/departments they applied to for employment, current and previous research interests, teaching interests.
2. “What made you interested in Criminology?”

- a. What I'm looking for: Current involvement with CC, if personal experience with the CJS impacted a desire to study crime, transition from interest in Criminology to interest in Convict Criminology.
3. "I see on the face sheet that you were ___ years old when you were convicted for _____. Can you tell me more about your contact with the criminal justice system and how it's affected you?"
 - a. What I'm looking for: Initial emotional response to the conviction, impact on family life and social relationships, any subsequent contact with CJS after initial conviction, type of facility where they were imprisoned, experiences in prison and changes in perception of "criminals," impact on employment and education after initial conviction and after imprisonment.

SEGMENT 2

1. "I'd like to get into your experiences with stigma and how you navigate that. To start, can you share any examples of times where you felt like you were treated differently as a result of your criminal record? Let's begin with the months following your release from prison and then continue through your time in higher education."
 - a. What I'm looking for: emotional response to the experiences (sadness, anger, acceptance, disappointment, surprise) and actions in response to the experiences to mitigate those emotions (actions to directly change the emotion and actions to change the experience causing the emotion).
 - b. Potential Probes:
 - i. "What was your reaction to that experience? How did it make you feel?"
 - ii. "How did you deal with those emotions?"

- iii. “How did you deal with situations like that in general?”
2. “Did you experience similar situations at school as well? Can you tell me about them?”
 - a. What I’m looking for: same as question 1, differences in reactions compared to earlier response.
 - b. Potential Probes:
 - i. “What are some differences between these situations and the ones you experienced before? I’d like to hear about the situations themselves and your reactions to them.”
3. “Tell me more about your time as a graduate student learning about crime and justice, and more specifically Convict Criminology.”
 - a. What I’m looking for: examples of experiences with stigma, changes in emotional response to those experiences, changes in coping methods for those experiences, how class and mentorship affected these experiences.
 - b. Potential Probes:
 - i. “Did your classes impact the way you perceived your experiences with stigma? How?”
 - ii. “In that kind of setting, were you still treated differently as a result of your criminal record?”
 - iii. “Did you ever confide in your mentor about these situations?”
 - iv. “Did your methods for dealing with those kinds of situations change compared to your time as an undergraduate?”

4. “I want to move on to your experiences as a faculty member. Can you summarize what it was like when you started applying and then interviewing for a position at a college or university?”
 - a. What I’m looking for: what kinds of institutions the participant applied to, assistance from their mentor, differences between job interviews between institutions and programs, motivations for applying to CJ/Criminology, Sociology/Criminology, or CJ programs, level of honesty about criminal record during interviews, rejections or roadblocks from their criminal record, and issues with CJ/Crim./Sociology department.
 - b. Potential Probes:
 - i. “What role did your mentor play for you during all of that?”
 - ii. “Were you worried about the background check?”

SEGMENT 3

1. “Now I really want to dig into your involvement with Convict Criminology. We talked a little bit about this earlier, but what sparked your interest about it? How did you become a Convict Criminologist?”
 - a. What I’m looking for: motivations for wanting to learn/teach/research in CC, faculty culture, faculty response to interviewee’s presence and research, tenure process, ways their record is involved with tenure process.
2. “What is it like to be a Convict Criminologist? Walk me through what it is that you do.”
 - a. What I’m looking for: emotional responses to teaching/researching about essentially “themselves”/ their similar circumstances, how they perceive general

criminal stigma and how they apply that to themselves, their methods for coping with their current perception of stigma, and how their involvement with CC intermingles with those methods.

b. Potential Prompts:

i. “Do you ever see yourself in your research?”

ii. “How does that feel?”

iii. “Do you feel stigmatized?”

iv. “How, if at all, do you think your involvement with CC has helped you cope and navigate criminal stigma?”

3. “Thinking back on how you navigated stigma directly following your conviction and how you navigate it now, do you think your methods for coping have changed at all?”

a. What I’m looking for: changes in methods for coping, participant explanations for why those changes occurred.

b. Potential Probes:

i. “Why do you think it’s changed?”

4. “We’re getting close to the end of the interview. Before we stop, is there anything you want to add to what we’ve already discussed? Any final statements that you think would be important?”

“Thank you again for agreeing to meet with me. I’m really excited about this project and I’m glad that you wanted to be a part of it.”

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC FACE SHEET FOR A STUDY OF CONVICT

CRIMINOLOGISTS

1. Name (Provide a Pseudonym): _____
2. Gender: _____
3. Age: _____
4. Race/Ethnicity: _____
5. Marital Status: _____
6. Degree and Specific Discipline: _____
7. Years Involved in Crime and Justice Studies: _____
8. Years Involved in Convict Criminology: _____
9. Are you tenured or tenure-track at your institution? If not, what is your current position?
(If your position has been affected by COVID-19, what was your position during the Fall semester of 2019?) _____
10. How old were you at the time of your conviction? _____
11. How long were you imprisoned? _____
12. For what crime were you convicted?

APPENDIX C: SELF-DISCLOSED DEMOGRAPHIC MAKEUP OF PARTICIPANTS

	Age	Gender	Race	Conviction	Years in Convict Criminology	Degrees	Occupation	Time Incarcerated
Valarie	36	Female	White	Drug Crimes and Burglary; Felony	8 years	Sociology Doctorate	Tenure-Track Assistant Professor	13 months
Jenn	34	Female	Latina, Mixed-Race	Disorderly Conduct & Possession of a Controlled Substance; Misdemeanor	2 years	Criminology Doctorate	Tenure-Track Assistant Professor	0 years
Jesse	NA	Male	White	Burglary; Felony	Unknown	Criminology Doctorate	Assistant Professor	0 years
Micky	48	Female	White	Fraud; Felony	5 years	Criminal Justice Doctorate	Tenure-Track Assistant Professor	10.5 months
Zaria	48	Female	Black	Conspiracy to Commit Fraud; Felony	3 years	Social Work Doctorate	Senior Associate in Activist Reform Group	1 year
Lucas	39	Male	White	Sex Crime; Felony	11 years	Criminology Master	Adjunct Professor	1 year