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SPEAKERS

Jenn Tostlebe, Sade Lindsay, Jose Sanchez



Jose Sanchez 00:14

Hey, everybody. Welcome to The Criminology Academy podcast where we are criminally academic. My name is Jose Sanchez.



Jenn Tostlebe 00:20

and I'm Jenn Tostlebe.



Jose Sanchez 00:22

Today we have Professor Sade Lindsey on the academy to talk with us about reentry, post-release from prison, employment, and the prison credential dilemma, which is a term she coined in the paper we'll be discussing today.



Jenn Tostlebe 00:33

Dr. Sade Lindsay is an assistant research professor in the Brook School of Public Policy at Cornell University, and a W.E.B. DuBois fellow in the National Institute of Justice. Her research interests lie at the intersection of criminal justice policy, punishment, and racial inequality. As a sociologist by training, she examines how criminal justice policy and practice such as collateral sanctions, drug laws, and prison education programs, impact individual life chances, social mobility, and overall well being. Dr. Lindsay's research has been published in journals such as *Criminology*, *Population Research and Policy Review*, *Journal of Research and Crime and Delinquency*, and *Social Problems*. She has received numerous awards for her scholarship, including from the American Society of Criminology, the American Sociological Association, and

the Society for the Study of Social Problems. And her research has been funded by the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Justice. We are so excited to have you on the podcast today. Thank you so much for joining us.

S

Sade Lindsay 01:37

Thank you all for having me. So happy to be here. Finally, I'm glad you all decide to come and get me on here. I'm really excited for this discussion and conversation.

J

Jose Sanchez 01:48

Absolutely, this is one we've been looking forward to. So, we're happy that it's happening. So, a brief overview of what today's episode is going to look like. We're gonna start with some general questions about incarceration, reentry and employment, then we're gonna move into an article that was published by our guests Sade and then if we have some time, at the end, we'd like to ask some questions about converting your dissertation into journal articles, which is basically what this paper is right? You converted one of your dissertation chapters into a journal article. So, with that being said, Jenn, why don't you go ahead and get us started?



Jenn Tostlebe 02:25

All right. So we want to start off our conversation relatively broad in true Crim Academy fashion. What?

J

Jose Sanchez 02:35

Shocker.



Jenn Tostlebe 02:36

Yeah. And, again, a shocker start with a quote unquote, simple question. So, in the United States, thinking about socio demographic features, in particular sex and gender, race, and education? Who is it that we are incarcerating?

S

Sade Lindsay 02:55

I love this question, just because I feel like every criminologist who studies, incarceration, in some capacity, like this is always our warm up. Right? So, regardless, right? we all have [inaudible]. So, I appreciate this question. So, I mean, simply put, we incarcerate the most disadvantaged populations, and so that includes people who are vulnerable, because of where they live their race. So, Black and Hispanic, and Native American communities are disproportionately impacted. And specifically, racial disparities are really stark between Black, Hispanic, and White individuals. So, Black men in particular, but Black Americans more broadly, are about five times more likely to be incarcerated than White people. And then also Hispanic

people are about 1.3 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Hispanic White people. And so that's sort of one demographic and one way it impacts folks. And then also we incarcerate poor people, right? And so that includes a lot of poor white people as well, right? This is not a system that just impacts racial minorities. It's a system that impacts people across racial lines through the way that we criminalize poverty and so on and so forth. And so, incarceration right now, especially given this rise of like, class inequalities, and incarceration, has been sort of reserved for poor, the poor people in the poor. And so that's where we're at and then as far as gender, right? Usually, when we think of incarceration, right, we're thinking about men, and that's certainly true as far as numerically, men make up most of the population in which we incarcerate. But over the past since the rise of mass incarceration, but especially over the past two decades, incarceration rates among women have sort of exploded. So since 1980, they've increased by about 400%, which is a lot, right? So, it's no longer just the system that disproportionately or the system that impacts men. It is also a system, right? That is sort of cooped up many women along the way as well. And so those are sort of the broad ways, which how incarceration sort of impacting communities differentially, but also how it's been changing through this period of mass incarceration as well.



Jenn Tostlebe 05:28

Great. And so you may have noticed that I kind of left out employment, you did touch on poverty, but I left out unemployment in that original question. And that was really on purpose, because our focus today is going to be on employment, although I know that these other socio demographic features really tie in with employment. And so based off of my work, interviewing people who are incarcerated, I know that these individuals are engaged in employment, or a large majority of them are engaged in employment before incarceration. But can you tell us in more detail what this employment actually looks like for people prior to entering prison?

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Sade Lindsay 06:09

Yeah, so I had from the interviewer work that I've done and have been doing, I had a participant word this really well, when he was just describing his relationship with work throughout his life. It's like I'm either underemployed or unemployed, right? And so that really describes a lot of the experiences of people who get caught up in this system, right? They're not able to pursue an education, a good quality education before their incarceration, right, these are sort of the fundamental causes that a lot of people talk about, especially when we talk about like, abolition, and so on and so forth. It's like, addressing the root causes. People have spotty work histories, people are not because right? Like, it's not because of any sort of individual fault of their own right? But not having access to quality education, right? Then impacts your ability to go on and get a job, right. And it also impacts your risk of involvement with the criminal justice system. And so a lot of the work that the people in my study described, and that we know, of is the type of work that like, people don't consider something like the dignified and valued work of society, it's so important, right? Like having a janitor, right? Cleaning, we learned that during COVID, and so on, and so forth. All of those are essential, but we don't value them in the same ways. And so there's that aspect. And then a lot of the times, right? These are people who have still been afforded incarceration, who were sort of locked out of labor markets are sort of forgotten about in certain so a lot of like, underemployment, or

unemployment in the communities in which they're from. And so I would say that it's not great before prison either, right? But also prison does. It's not a solution right to that, and it doesn't help their case afterwards, either.

J Jose Sanchez 08:07

Okay, so let's fast forward a little bit. And so one of the things that I think we've established in previous episodes is that most people that go to prison, come out of prison. Right? So, and another thing that we know is that formerly incarcerated individuals typically have a difficult time finding employment upon release, especially quality employment, right? Like you mentioned, underemployed, just how difficult is it for formerly incarcerated people to find work? What is the unemployment rate among formerly incarcerated individuals? Yeah.

i 08:43

yeah. So, I think one of our like, core problems, and just criminology criminal justice is like data having like good data, data, like the infrastructure, right? We have, we keep track of a lot of things. But we don't have a good information, you have 50 different states, right? Who 50 different ways there's doing, right? Like so it's like really hard to have the data. But the estimates that we do have aren't as great as we would expect. And so I think it was a Prison Policy Initiative, had been able to get some numbers to help us understand, right? How bad is unemployment among people have been incarcerated, and they came out with numbers, an unemployment rate of 27%. And so to put that into some sort of perspective, this is 2018 and 2018, the unemployment rate was 4% for the US population as a whole, so that's quite a difference. But then also like this 27% number, we never even reached that level of unemployment at the height of the COVID pandemic, or even during sort of our the most economically disastrous moments in history like the Great Depression, right? Right? And so you have a population of people who are literally their everyday lives are sort of have that level of like deprivation and inability to be included in society in meaningful ways. And so I like to put it in perspective in those ways, because 27%, like, that is a huge number. But like, These are conditions that no one has, you know, people have not lived through those types of conditions and trying to find work. And so I think it's important.

J Jose Sanchez 10:32

And how would you say that, like, the stigmatization, or discrimination based on a race kind of comes to play into the unemployment?

S Sade Lindsay 10:42

Yeah, so I think it comes into play a lot, right? So people, when we think about class, we think about education, right? Those are racialized, and that people, Black, Hispanic folks are disproportionately poor, right? They're sort of coincide, they are together. And so like, when I talk about those early experiences, right? A lot of that inability to find work, and so on and so forth, is sort of stemming from that racialized class, those inequalities that happen long before, right, your incarceration. And so these sort of get heightened when you're thinking about just

people who have been incarcerated, because you're sort of separating out usually folks who were able to go on and get an education, and so on and so forth, you have like the most sort of marginalized, vulnerable population. And so a lot of right? We know that black men, right? Hispanic men are represented in these percentages, so that in and of itself, right? Is going to drive that up because of that racial discrimination and so on. And so, as well, when we separate them out, you can see that for White men, the gap between men without criminal records, and men with criminal records, who are employed and unemployed, etc. Right? Is much larger, because white men tend to do better, right? With employment overall. And the gap is much smaller for black and Hispanic men, because even when you don't have a record, right? You have trouble finding work because of that. And so it's really interesting, right? What that does, then to these numbers, right, when we sort of condensed them and how we talk about how we might address this, because you have two separate sort of processes going on racial discrimination and this criminal record piece.



Jenn Tostlebe 12:37

So, based off of these large percentages of unemployment, what are some of the reasons that had been proposed for these kinds of outcomes?



Sade Lindsay 12:49

Yeah, so sort of getting into what we talked about as some like who we incarcerate. So, I think for a long time, criminologist and sociologists and other punishment scholars are trying to tease out whether it's, is it the fact that you know, they don't have the formal credentials, and so on and so forth? Or is it this actual like, is it incarceration, that's the cause of these inequities? And I think what we've come to the conclusion is that it's a little of both, right? Incarceration literally disrupts your life, like the life where if you are removed from your community, you're removed from your ability to go on and enroll in college and do all of these things in ways that you desire to whenever you want to, right. And then also, there's the aspect of that, like, we are incarcerated right? People who never had the means to be able to be socially or economically mobile anyway. And so a lot of studies, like experimental work has helped been able to, like tease this out. Is it the mark of a criminal record? Is it the fact that folks are under skilled or qualified, at least in terms of the formal credentials, because we know that this population is not under skilled and so on, and so forth? So, I think that's been the largest debate, at least in my understanding of the past couple of decades. And now we've been just trying to understand, right? The we recognize that the harm, right, incarceration can be both just sort of a symptom and the harm that's been caused for many folks and disruptive and so what do we do about it now is where I think,



Jose Sanchez 14:35

So, talking about what do we do about it? We have seen some movement in that arena, right? Like, I think a lot of people may be familiar with the ban the box movement where you're not required to disclose whether you were convicted of a felony until later on in the process. We've also seen maybe some reconsideration on restrictions for occupational licenses. So, for like a barbers license, can you tell us a little bit more about these initiatives and where they currently stand in their development?

S

Sade Lindsay 15:06

Yeah, so we've been sort of addressing or attacking, I don't know, I don't want to use violence. I guess, attacking this problem, in many ways, and people have been doing, you know, the best that they can with the sort of research that we have to make these sort of informed policy decisions. So, with ban the box, that's one example, right? We found out that, hey, if we remove this, maybe this might help folks. But then obviously, we know that there were the unintended effects of removing criminal record box for black men, because they weren't able to signal that they did not have a criminal record if it did not. And employers made assumptions about that. And right? So, we could see how this is so enmeshed the race and the criminal record is so enmeshed. So, even when good intention policies like the in the box, sort of proliferate across states as a solution, we get into this difficulty of this challenge of like, dealing with these unintended effects and the racial inequality. I think occupational licensing, again, this is stuff that's happening like across, you know, 50, states doing 50 different things. We know that the states sort of adopt similar policies over time, there's sort of like isomorphism, across states and policy environments. But I think there are differences in how they're sort of tackling the occupational licensing issue. So, like, some states are very much more, I don't want to call it hands on, but they're like, you can't use these broad terms like moral character in denying people a license with a criminal record, right. And so that's great, right? Because when you get into this discretionary space, where what is good moral character mean, that's when you start to see the inequalities seep in, right? What a criminal record means, you know, if you're a Black man, or if you're a Hispanic man is very different than what it means if you're a White man in encountering these spaces, so I think that is a better move. Other states are not as hands on in defining those sorts of things. And then also, the other thing that I think is a good development that's happening is the restoration of Pell grants in prisons and just having actual funds to be able to pursue a quality education without going into debt, or all these other instances or situations that people experience. I think that's another good development in the right direction.

S

Sade Lindsay 17:47

Is that like, super frequent now? Because that was federal? Right?

S

Sade Lindsay 17:52

Yeah. So what's happening is they are like doing piloting. And so the goal is to, so this is like federal funds, states, like, this is the great thing about it, right? Because states can't, or at least I don't think they can. Who knows? States are capable of many things. But I don't think that they can say right, you can't access the federal funds from the Pell grant. Right? The federal government was the one who sort of removed that access to begin with. And so that's the great thing, right? Because then you get more uniformity. And that's important, right? Like, where you live shouldn't determine right, if you can access something like a college education, so are where you're incarcerated. Yeah.



Jenn Tostlebe 18:40

All right. So, you know that reentry post-release from prison is super complicated, super difficult.

All right. So, we know that reentry post release from prison is super complicated, super difficult. Some people have described it as impossible or insurmountable. And this is a feat that we're asking over 600,000 people to do every year. Oftentimes, we hear employment being described as like, super important, if not one of the most important and routine parts of the reentry process. And so besides the obvious, like monetary aspects of having a job or employment, can you describe why employment is so vital for people upon release from prison?

S

Sade Lindsay 19:16

Yeah, yes, this is an excellent question. And I actually, I was pushed on this in my, like, in writing my dissertation because, you know, we have the, like you said, the normal sort of reasons why we know as criminologist, employment is important, or one of the important factors right. But I was pushed, what else like, why is work so important? And so I think that in a country like ours, right, where we tie so many benefits to work, we tie health insurance, we tie government, like your ability to get like SNAP or other sorts of things now to a resource have government resources to whether you have a job or whether you're working, right? And so there's some aspect to like being locked out of a system, not on your own choosing, right, but because you literally can't access what it takes to get access to those sorts of resources that she might need, on top of the other collateral sanctions and things right, that people deal with. And then I think there's also this aspect, which I've, throughout my interviews, sort of picked up on is like, because I think it's something about like this deep exclusion, right, it's like, everyday people get some sort of sense, derive some sense of belonging, some people, right, find a passion and work and so on and so forth. But like not being able to access that like, that what everyone else can get from work if they choose, has this sort of demoralizing or negative impact on people beyond like, that's like mental health, that's like motivation, right? If you feel like it's insurmountable, right, then why even try. And so there's some of that as well. So, I think it's something about the way that we value and then tie everything to work and not being able to then, right, you like, feel like there's this sense of detachment from others. And it does have an impact on like, your sense of self, and so on and so forth. And reentry.



Jenn Tostlebe 21:31

Yeah, I mean, people definitely do tie a lot of their self worth to their career and what they're doing. So, not just getting a job at McDonald's flipping burgers, or whatever, but what is it that I do? And that's a big deal in this culture in the United States in particular, so yeah.

S

Sade Lindsay 21:49

yeah, absolutely. And I think the other reason why this aspect is so important, right? Because this is tapping into like, again, like quality or dignified work like something even if it's, right, janitorial work, right? Do we pay them? Right? Like, we value things right? Through pay, through how people, right, like, so like, do we pay that type of stuff, or that type of work? Well, and things like those sorts of things that even if it is something like having a janitor present, like a position as a janitor, right? That's still like, extremely important. And we should value it as such, right? But like for criminologists, I think it taps into this piece where it's not just any work, right? Like, the reason why work is important is not just like you just you have a job,

right? It's also about like, the attachment, the bonds, right? This right? And so like, you can't get that just getting people into any sort of job. You have to be able to at least get them some sort of dignified work some work that like is meaningful, right? Yeah.

J Jose Sanchez 22:55

Yeah. Okay, so I think we've laid a pretty good foundation to start moving into your paper. So, the paper we're going to be talking about today is titled, "Damned if you do damned if you don't: How formerly incarcerated men navigate the labor market with prison credentials". It was published in Criminology in 2022. It actually just came out in print not that long ago. And, of course, it was authored by our guest. In this article Sade draws from 50 qualitative interviews with formerly incarcerated men in Ohio, in order to examine how people who have been incarcerated prepare for reentry and navigate the labor market. Sade also introduces what she coined as the prison credential dilemma, a concept that we will be discussing a little bit later. Is that a fair quick summary of your paper?

S Sade Lindsay 23:46

Yes.

J Jose Sanchez 23:47

Okay, great. Great. So, our opening question, and I'm pretty sure anyone that listens to this podcast knows what this question is going to be. What was the motivation behind this paper?

S Sade Lindsay 24:00

Yeah, so I think there were a few different motivations. And some of this ties to like my own work in doing sort of community engaged work in prisons. And then some of it is sort of right, like as a researcher reading the literature and making sense of like, what's going on. And honestly, it was a mix of both. I did a lot of programming in prison while I was in grad school, with this program called Buck I Reach, I went to Ohio State course. And so we would design educational programs, right? And you've seen this culture of other colleges and so on and so forth, kicking in to help go into prisons, and educate folks, especially after the removal of Pell grants and other resources. And so this was like one of those sort of programs and we would go in, do programming, educational stuff, real life, sort of like finances and like sort of stuff where I'm like, some of it I'm like, is this like going to help someone, like this is great, right? But is this when they get out, like, if you don't have money, right, like, like, you know, it's kind of hard to learn finances if you don't have the resources and things like that. And so there was like some of that, like, where I'm like, oh, maybe we should be doing something different. And so that's what made me like, you know, it sparked my general interest, but then also made me go to the literature because I'm like, I know, there, criminologist are studying these things, these programs, and so on and so forth. And of course, they were, and they are, and even sociologists to usually like the 70s, and 80s, and so on and so forth, had a lot of sociologists studying prison programming, as well. And so that sort of led me to this work. And then from there, reading the literature, honestly, I was like, where are experiences of formerly

incarcerated people, like people who have gone through these programs? Like, do they use these credentials, right? There's so much variation and like, like, what type of job you can get while you're in prison? Would you list that on your resume? Like all of these questions that I have? Just practically, right? What does this look like? That weren't answered? And theoretically, they're answered, right? And I'm sure we'll get into that. But like, practically, what is this look like? And how does this work? And so I felt that that was missing. And especially like, if we're talking about marginalized group, people with criminal records, people have been incarcerated, right? More, adding the voice in their experiences only helps bolster the quantitative work that we're so good at in criminology. And most of the work that had been done in this area was also quantitative. And so that was sort of the motivation. And this piece is adding in the missing voice, right? We're talking about signaling. You can't signal without someone who's, right, doing the signal, like the sender of the signal. So.



Jenn Tostlebe 27:03

Yeah, cool. I kind of thought at first, you'd make the joke that, like you needed to get a dissertation. So, that motivation, we've had that before. And I was like, I wonder, but no, it really wasn't. Because I was cool that your experiences gave you this idea. That's really, instead of just being like, I need a dissertation topic, let's figure it out. It was like you went through this process that led you to this. And yeah.



Sade Lindsay 27:32

it just so happened to be at the time, right? Like I was already Yeah. Right. But like it happened to be at the time when I started thinking about dissertation topics. And I was like, Well, if this is a burning question, I'm gonna listen, this was one of my potential ones. And I ended up being the one that I picked.



Jenn Tostlebe 27:51

Yeah. All right. So, in our kind of opening discussion on employment and reentry, we fully skipped over the aspects related to work during incarceration. And so we're hoping that you can fill this gap for us. So, what type of prison programming or work experiences are available to individuals related to employment? And I'm sure this varies by state, by prison, and so on. And do we know how many people actually partake in these programming opportunities?



Sade Lindsay 28:23

Yeah, so that was, the first thing that was gonna say that I really does vary. And especially programming varies from facility to facility a lot, right? Because a lot of how we think about programming is based on the population and the facility. So, if you've got, you know, a lot of lifers, right, people doing long sentences, right? There's not this urgency to provide them with educational opportunities in the same ways for other facilities. And a lot of my participants, right, talked about that, right, the impact of like, being transferred to another facility, or having to make decisions about alright, this facility is closer to my family, my hometown, that this facility has more like resources for me educationally, and so on and so forth. And so I think that

is like really important to like note, and the sort of decision making that goes into that I just was not expecting, though I should have, right, this is not, but like, it's just not something that came out in the literature a lot. This sort of everyday practices and decisions that people have to make. But to get back to this question, this excellent question is, so we're now starting to collect more like detailed information about the types of programming that people participate in, like we have participation for these broad categories for like vocation or like, secondary education, right, but we don't have this sort of detail great like, what is that? Right? Is it just all of these certain types of degrees where you don't have much opportunity to pick? Or is it like, you get access to sort of anything that a normal sort of college program would have, or so on and so forth? And so I think, now we're starting, especially with, I should have written this down, it was the, was it the Second Chance Act? No, not the Second Chance Act, the First Step Act, sorry, there's so many bipartisan bills at the federal level. But the First Step Act was a part of that was to start having more detailed information and data collection efforts on how people are doing after their incarceration, also having like certain programs that are required, or allow you to get incentives, and so on, and so forth. So, it's getting much better. As far as numbers, ones that I commonly know of is that just in general, about 40% of people have been incarcerated go on to, like, complete some, like educational degree, whether that be GED or something like that, like to advance their education. So, they basically are going in participating in some sort of educational program about 40%. Some that includes things that are mandated to right, so GED programs are often mandated now in certain states. So, as far as work, a lot of the work that they do is geared around keeping the prison functional, like functioning. So, it's your porters, which, you know, cleaning, food dietary, obviously, there are more like their jobs that are more, feel more dignified, are better or higher status in the prison environment. When people tend to go towards those, I had men who liked to be in the weight rooms. I don't know managing, I guess the weight room and things like that versus doing dietary or porters like that was sort of the what they considered to be sort of the everyone has to have a job. So if you don't have one of these other jobs, you're a porter. Right? So yeah, so that's sort of the broad scope based on their experiences. But really, like, I'm hoping that the new policies and stuff will help with data collection and data, getting better estimates. Yeah.

J Jose Sanchez 32:39

So, there's a part in your paper where you state and I'm quoting, "although employers play a vital role in reentry, and reintegration, formerly incarcerated people also have agency in the labor market". What aspects of this process do formerly incarcerated individuals have agency over?

S Sade Lindsay 32:58

Yeah, so I like to think about this, right, agency within the confines of like the structural constraints, right. So like, they still have some agency in deciding whether they're going to tell an employer about their criminal record, how they'll tell them about their criminal record, what types of jobs they apply to. So all of these are like decisions, right? They don't have to do that. It doesn't mean that there are no implications to those decisions, right? But the assumption can't be or shouldn't be, and I think we know now is the assumption is not like everyone's sort of dealing with the stigma, the same. People are managing it in various ways.




 Jenn Tostlebe 33:45

So, talking about the stigma management, you discuss stigma, stigma management, and the reactive proactive continuum, which relates to how much information people with criminal records will convey to employers. Can you first walk us through what stigma management is? And then maybe give us an overview of the proactive intermediate and reactive strategist?

 Sade Lindsay 34:09

Yeah, absolutely. So, I think stigma management is exactly that process of like deciding, right? How are you going to portray yourself as someone who has a stigmatized identity, whether it be a criminal record, whether it be some health condition, whether it be right, like even thinking about race, and racial stigma, how are you going to present yourself in terms of the labor market, right, that initial stage, usually, if you're going through formal processes, right, is that application, right? How are you going to portray yourself to an employer and so that is done in many ways, right? So one is this proactive strategy and those are people who are like, look, I am who I am. This is what it is like, I have a record or it, um, black or whatever, you know, like I am.

 Jenn Tostlebe 34:19

Take it or leave it?

 Sade Lindsay 34:49

Right! This is my name like you're gonna get Sade No. So like, yes signal I'm black, right, like so like there are people who are very proactive, right, that has consequences. And then there are people who are more reactive and that they know that there's this barrier, they assume that there can't possibly be, or they're sort of risk adverse and that they avoid these situations in which they feel like the stigmatized identity is going to be salient, or they'll be found out or etc. Right? So this might be people who avoid applying to certain jobs if they see that criminal record question. And there's a recent study that came out in AJS, literally on the same thing showing that when people see a criminal record question, they're less likely to apply to the job like they like, if you have that on your on there already. Like, I know that my likelihood it's probably not great, right? And so with that means that that's the sort of the more reactive strategies. And then this intermediate, right, where I might say, it will explain if I'm confronted with a criminal record question, and then contextualize it in the interview. Or I might say no, and then bring it up in the interview. So, there are different ways that people deal with it. And each has their own consequences, right? You can be rejected upfront, if you're proactive, or you could be rejected later, if you're in that intermediate stage. Or you could be right, counting yourself out altogether, when you did have a shot if you're more reactive.

 Jenn Tostlebe 36:44

And so another large part of this stigma management seems to be this idea of signaling or signaling theory, which you mentioned earlier, and I think is probably most well known in economics, although I'm not positive on that. Okay. And both Jose and I are familiar with

signaling theory through like the gang literature and gang joining, although it's been used across a variety of other things in criminology. And so with that being said, can you describe what signaling theory is in the context of employment opportunities for previously incarcerated individuals?

S Sade Lindsay 37:22

Yeah, so just broadly, right, like signaling is this idea that, like something like an educational credential, can send some sort of information to employers about an applicant's like abilities. Like if I have a degree from Ohio State in engineering, right, and I applied to an engineering job, right, that will signal something about my ability to do that work that they read. And so it's more, there's some nitty gritty stuff, but essentially, right, that's the main gist, employers are risk adverse, they're trying to get, you know, the bang for their buck, invest in, they invest a lot of time and hiring, and so on, and so forth. So, they're trying to get the most out of hiring, recruiting and training folks out of that. And so they sort of go to these sorts of signals, like education as a way to do that. And the same thing with sort of gangs. And it's a similar process of just information sharing, and a lot of it in employment, you're doing it without ever having met the employer or that like never having met face. And so as far as for people with criminal records, who have been incarcerated, the sort of idea, right is that this mark of a criminal worker is like almost a negative credential, like you're here, and then right, like, or everyone else is here. And then you're like, kind of starting back here. And so the idea is that if we sort of credential our way into, right, like equity or equality, like that is possible, or at least, right, like moving by a little bit. Exactly. And so, right, like, that is the sort of main understanding of how even credentials in prison would work. And so that's a little piece. And it's not just educational credentials, you see this with like certificates of relief, which is just showing like to an employer or housing or landlord saying that, hey, this person is credible, right? Even though they have a criminal record, they're credible, and so on, and so forth. So, that's a little bit of what it is.

J Jose Sanchez 39:38

Okay. And so now's the time where I deliver on that promise that I made earlier that we're going to discuss the term that you coined. And so in this paper, you proposed the prison credential dilemma as an alternative explanation for understanding the inconsistent evidence in the labor market context which we've been discussing. So, can we start off with what exactly is the prison credential dilemma? And how does it relate to signaling theory?

S Sade Lindsay 40:06

Yeah. So, just when I went into this, I mentioned this earlier, like this project, it's like, I literally just wanted to know, like, what is going on? How are they using it? Are they using it? Right, these very basic questions. And so that really did allow me to theorize more about what is going on, and why there's so much like mixed evidence about whether these credentials are effective or helpful, especially with employment. And so part of that was asking these very basic questions to people. And sometimes I felt like, they probably think I know nothing about applying to jobs with some of these like, so how do you list it? Like, do you like I'm asking, like, literally basic question. Like, that allowed me to really like theorize in meaningful ways. And when you're thinking about signaling theory, it really is like, there are many moving parts,

right? So there's right, the credential or the signal. And then there's the sender of the signal, right, like, so there's the signal, you can think about, like the credential. And that has many like associations, right? If I got a degree from Ohio State versus Yale or Harvard, right, there's that. But then there's the element of like the person, right, so as let's say, a Black woman, that having that Harvard degree would mean something vastly different than a White man having that Harvard degree in the labor market rate. So, it's like a very complicated process. And that's sort of what I'm like trying to show and tease out here with the prison credential dilemma, which is basically critiquing the sort of assumptions of signaling theory in the context of having like prison programming credentials and using them in the labor market. And so from the experiences of the participants, they basically, in asking these basic questions, we're sort of talking about the tension between having this positive sort of credential or positive signal that they can send to employers about being skilled being, right, like, not being, right, having gone to prison, and made their time serve them is like split, some of the participants talked about one actually said, like, I'm making time serve me, so on and so forth, right? And then there's the element, right? Having ever gone to prison, right? And how do you then talk about that, or use the credential. And also try to make sure that you can conceal your criminal record, right, like, so these are the sorts of tensions, it's like, you have this credential, but it's marked by your time, having been spent in prison by you acquiring get in prison, right, and all the assumptions that people will make about the quality of it, and whether like, it's legit, and so on, and so forth. And then also right, like having to then navigate still right, how to signal or use it in the labor market without also saying, Hey, I have a criminal record, or hey, I've been in the prison.



Jenn Tostlebe 43:21

Alright, so let's dive then into your results. I think we have a nice theoretical footing to do that. And so let's start kind of from a grounding point, which is just where are the men in your sample successful at finding employment after prison? And how did they view their prison credentials? Was it a positive thing, a negative, something in between?



Sade Lindsay 43:45

Yeah, so this is a great question. So, I think one of the things that a lot of them, at least that I thought was interesting, and what sort of links back to my earlier discussion about like, the importance of like, work in the self, and so on and so forth. Is that like, they still regardless of how other people might view or did view these credentials, they still saw these as overwhelmingly positive. There were some people who, sort of who like fell outside of that, but it was very few most did not regret having gone and participated in the programming, they got something from it, whether it was like a space right to be around like minded folks, or just the skills, they received something from it, right? Some people right, or you're dealing with folks who have not had good relationships with educational systems. And so to have a positive experience in a program, right, is great. However, I think that was complicated right still by like You know, you're doing all you can to, you know, do what you need to do to show right I've changed look at have the qualifications. And there's still difficulty. So, most of the men, at least immediately getting out, weren't able to just go use their credentials in some area of work that was related to it. There were a few who did for like things like masonry. And there was another, I'm trying to think of what field he was in, but they weren't like, fields where you needed to go and apply through formal application processes, either, right? They were fields where like one

guy who was successful, was able to because like his family had a business. And then that helped him right in the long run. And so there was a lot of that. And so I show right, well, so what happens after you get out? You see, this is not even helping me, right? How do people adapt?

J Jose Sanchez 46:00

So at this point, it's been established, based upon your interviews that the participants were aware and acknowledge the personal credential dilemma. From here, you move into a discussion were you talking about the tactics used to navigate the labor market given this dilemma. The first of which is dissemblance? I think I pronounced that right, right. Yep. Or, which is the act of hiding something such as the truth on job applications? Can you tell us more about this strategy?

S Sade Lindsay 46:31

Yeah. So, this sort of, I would say, aligns more with the intermediate kind of stigma management strategy, where people for dissembling, we're still trying to make the decisions about like how to sort of list this credential without signaling their incarceration records, or having employers devalue it, because they got it while they're incarcerated. And so they came up with lots of creative ways, right? Because like I said, you're dealing with a population who, before prison didn't have a lot of opportunities, or like formal credentials, right. And so some people are really relying on what they've gotten from prison, [inaudible] spent a lot of their lives in prison, right? And so they're like, you know, they don't have a choice, right, they kind of have to build up what they did in prison, to market themselves in creative ways. And so some guys would change the sort of name of the credential like if it had anything on the certificate about the credential. And they felt weird about like if an employer asked for that, which they usually don't, right? But they still would change on the resume. Like, I might just say, like when participants had dodge correction, or dodge contractors instead of correctional facility, etc. Right? So, they're changing the names a little bit. And I think that was one of the larger way some guys would leave it out. But that was dependent on right, if they had prior work experience, right? They could afford to be like, I don't want to put that down, right to send up a red flag. And so I mean, it's unfortunate either way, right? You shouldn't have to make the decision about whether you're going to use something you worked hard for. But it really did depend on like, how much work experience they could pull on from outside of prison and credentials, and so on and so forth, about, it depended on that regarding whether they use this strategy.




Jenn Tostlebe 48:31

Alright, so the second tactic then was using redemptive, I feel like I just slaughtered that word too. Redemptive narratives in job interviews. And so what did this strategy look like for your participants? And did they see it as an effective way of obtaining employment?

S Sade Lindsay 48:52

Yeah, so one of the participants that actually went on to get a job right after he was

Yeah, so one of the participants that actually went on to get a job right after he was incarcerated with his credential, he actually used this. And he was like, a firm believer that this was the way to go. And a lot of them, right use this. I mean, it makes sense, right? If you're dependent on this thing, let's say at the application stage, you were like, let me at least get my foot in the door, right, into the interview where I could be like, look, I did this for 18 months, and I had to, right, still go to work or I had to be right, like, it's a lot of it's a lot of work to go on and get a credential in prison. And so they cared about the context, and they felt that they weren't able to have that context or to be able to give that context until the interview. And so once they got in the interview, they saw that, you know, their ability to weave in what they did while they were incarcerated. They thought that that was effective, even if it didn't right, lead to them going to get a job right. In the interview, they felt that employers were at least like more respectful and addressing the issue of like the criminal record within the context of this narrative, this redemptive narrative. But also, I think there was one thing that I wanted to say, but it slipped my mind. So, I'm sure it'll come back to me. But yeah, this one was interesting. And it was similar to that sort of intermediate strategy. I mean, in most of this was an intermediate strategy, especially when you're talking about like a dilemma, right? It's changing depending on the context and your own background, and so on and so forth.

 Jose Sanchez 50:40

Right. Okay. So, sometimes the dissemblance and redemptive narrative strategies were unsuccessful, or in other cases, the participants were hesitant to use prison credentials at all. In this case, one tactic used to find quality work was doubling down on credentials. What kinds of credentials were sought after? And was it challenging for your participants to gain more credentials?

 Sade Lindsay 51:05

Yes. So, I think one of the things that I don't know, if I've made it, like, I'm sure you will, and probably other people who watch this probably go through like the same things, when you're reading your published work, you're like, I wish I would have like really honed in, on like, how unfair this is, right? Like, this was a point where I was like, we can't credential your way out of an issue that is like structural in nature, right? As far as like policies that need to be changed or put in place to help people who do go on to get credentials. And so for this one, doubling down was essentially, like, I'm locked out of the labor market for at least quality sort of positions, I may have a crappy job, or a job that isn't paid well, etc. But like, I know that there's something, right, so these people eventually, or ultimately decided to go back to college goes back to school, as a way to sort of help bolster either what they learned in prison or a sort of career path that they aspire to go down. And so some of that was, there were people who were barbers in prison, didn't have access to the actual barbering school, like some in the actual prison that they were in at least, but they cut hair, right? While they're incarcerated, everyone's here. And that's a big responsibility in prison. This participant talked about it a lot. And I was like, I respect it, I understand what you mean. Like, if you mess up, someone's hair cut, that's a problem. And so.

 Jenn Tostlebe 52:45

Especially when you can't get away from them.

S

Sade Lindsay 52:47

So he was like, but like, I got so good at it that, you know, it became like, my passion. And he talked about, like, how you love making people feel good, especially think about the environment. And like the fourth visit, and like, just very, like it was very, very, very meaningful. And so after he got out, he was just trying to like, sort of make ends meet, but decided to go back to, like, pursue that, because he really enjoyed it was more than just like art, it was more like therapeutic too. And I also ran into a lot of people who went, ran into, interviewed a lot of people who went to, like, become like drug counselors or social work, like sort of like the therapeutic model, which I mean, it makes sense, right? People who like, you usually are sort of driven by the things that you've gone through and trying to, a lot of folks want to help other people not have to go through some of those things. And there were a few who liked successfully, I would say about four that I recall, who like successfully were able to go through barber school or associate degree or some sort to get that credential afterwards. But a lot of folks that was just not something that they could go on and do, whether it be for financial reasons, right? So, like student loan debt got talked a lot about and also talked about as a sort of driver to returning to prison not being able to manage that debt. And then also like the criminal record in and of itself, right, we're only just now getting to the point where we're removing criminal record questions from like the common app and other college applications. And so people dealt a lot with that. And even though we removed those, there still are processes, not like just Oh, come on in. It's like no, you gotta go through this review board. You gotta fill out this paperwork, right, like so it's still exclusionary, even though it seems inclusive.



Jenn Tostlebe 54:53

Right. And so there's one final tactic that was mentioned in your paper and that was temporary kind of precarious work. So, how did you respondents use this strategy?

S

Sade Lindsay 55:04

Yeah, so there's like, tons. This is not like sort of a new thing as far as like people having no rely on temporary work. But I thought it was interesting as far as like, how people thought about their relationship to that job, right? Is it really temporary? Or is this like, turning into some sort of long term precarious work situation. And essentially, what I found there were like, a subset of respondents, they were usually a little older, I would say, who sort of saw this as this was like temporary work, maybe they could work their way into a permanent position, if they just keep, you know, going back to the same temp agency and employer. And that usually did not happen, right? That's not what that work is designed for. And then there were other respondents who saw this, right, they were using this in combination with like, trying to go back to school, right, you got to make ends meet. And then also sometimes, right, their work requirements, if you're on parole and probation, I didn't have that come up a lot with this group. I was, I think, mostly because they were a little farther removed, like the average time since their last incarceration was about five years. But there were some variation in that, right. So, they didn't have the same demands to work, because they're on, they were paroled or etc. But that is a thing that happens, right? Where people feel they have to do any sort of work in order to stay within the bounds of their sort of release confinement agreements.



Jenn Tostlebe 56:43

Yeah, absolutely.



Jose Sanchez 56:44

Okay. So given what we know about prison credentials, based on your work, and what we've discussed so far, what are some of the implications that your work has for research, policy, and practice?



Sade Lindsay 56:54

Yeah, so I keep saying this is one that but this is also one that I've like thought a lot about, right? Because it's like, it's a very complicated situation, right? It really is. It's like, oh, I don't want to like, say something and then it gets taken. And you know, someone makes some policy, right? Like, I did not want to be the person and be like, look, this doesn't work, right? It doesn't mean remove all programming from prison, because it doesn't work. Right? I did not want to be that and I tried to be very clear about that. I think what I would call for is more structural, like addressing the structural issues, like restricting employers ability, right, these fair chance, fair chance laws are good way, right, like restricting their ability to even access the record until after a job offer, that's something that I can get, like, get down with, right? Like it even still, there needs to be a bit more, but like, by the time you get a job offer, right? Employers are invested, you've proven yourself, right? So there's usually not that much change after that. But I think something else that could help bolster this right is like we have like Work Opportunity Tax Credits for that federal government gives to employers who hire folks who usually have high unemployment rates that includes people with felonies. And so like, there are other ways, right? We have these policies where we can sort of merge, right? Like why not give employers more money if they hire someone who, right in this field of like HVAC, or a plumber, right for hiring someone with this credential to help pair that and bolster the effectiveness of that. But these are sort of like the like, I can think of so many ways where it wouldn't take much to be able to help make these more effective if we want to go the route of investing in these but it does take money that is not like just investing in programming, right?



Jenn Tostlebe 58:56

And hopefully, then if these kinds of things were implemented these strategies that people are relying on what needs to be relied on as much.



Sade Lindsay 59:06

Right. And I think I think some of that, right, it's like, another suggestion, right, is just to literally make it so that any credential does not have anything written on it about the facility that all the people who participated in it know that right. When you listed on your resume, you list this not, right? I think there's some of that right, very basic things that get overlooked in this in sort of

implementing programming where the focus becomes so much on the actual programming and not so much on like, okay, what are people to do now, you know, when they get out and use these?



Jenn Tostlebe 59:44

Yeah, that's a good point. That seems like a really small change. That could be very beneficial.

S

Sade Lindsay 59:49

Yeah, yeah. There's so many Yeah, so many of like, smaller, I think ways to make these more effective. And then I also think Pell grants help too because then it sort of separates The institution as like it's no longer educational sort of, well, it is educational to somebody, you know what I mean? Like, it's no longer the sole person distributing credentials. And there's this actual legitimately recognized educational institution. So yeah.



Jenn Tostlebe 1:00:18

So we're fairly certain that this was part of your dissertation. Now, it's been confirmed. So, you know, I think a lot of times, at least me thinking about working on my dissertation now I'm like, holy crap, this is a huge document, how do you go from A to B to get this published? And it seems like you were pretty quick in turning your dissertation around, especially getting it in Crim, which I know takes forever to go through that process. And so can you walk us through the steps you took to convert your dissertation into this publication? We're talking about today?

S

Sade Lindsay 1:00:53

Yeah, absolutely. So, I think for me, I needed structure at the beginning, like, and I know that it could, you could still, like, take this approach, even if you've already started your dissertation, or are you finishing. You're trying to figure out alright, what, how can I do this, but I have broad questions for the dissertation that I knew could produce, like a lot of interesting things, right? I didn't necessarily know that, right, I would come up with this prison credential dilemma, etc, etc. But I had sort of these general questions that I was interested in, but I had a three, like, three article dissertation. And that format helped a lot narrow things down, but that you don't have to let that like sort of restrict you, right, you could still how, I operate it was, you can still, as you're going through the data, or as you're writing your dissertation, like keeping another document, because there are always going to be more research questions. But I think the trouble a lot of times is like focusing on just like producing, right, this is the research question, this is the chapter produce this, and figuring that out. And so like, honestly, I like kept that structure. I figured out from this broad research question, what was like the most like, needed, interesting, like, right thing. And that's what from the qual, that sort of chapter became, but there's a lot of other stuff and qualitative that I kept note of throughout the process. So really, I think it's mostly about like, asking broad enough questions, right? And then, like, picking one thing, and like going with that, and realizing that, like, there's other articles to come, you don't have this thing in there. And honestly, throughout the publication process like that helped too, right? Because there were certain things where I didn't emphasize in my dissertation chapter,

like I didn't emphasize the importance of race and racism enough and that was mostly because like, it was a lot in the paper already, to chew on. And so but that pushed me to be able to, I'm like, well, you're right, like, there's no way like, that was a bad decision on my part, right? And so like, that's a part of like, the publication process, too, as you all know, and not getting stuck in like, this is the thing, right? Still wanting to improve it. It's never done until it's published, but also staying like on sort of tasks and realizing you can always bounce back to write other papers.



Jenn Tostlebe 1:03:33

So, are there more papers in the process, then?

S

Sade Lindsay 1:03:36

Yeah, yes. Yes, there are. I have some cool stuff. So obviously, this, I'm gonna have more from these qualitative interviews. But then I had an audit chapter where I sent out, yeah, the resumes and sort of tested things with employers. And so there's a lot more to come in this regard, and hopefully helps push us further in this area, especially with all the great changes happening in programming, education and prison.

J

Jose Sanchez 1:04:06

Well, we'll be on the lookout for those. Looking forward to reading those. That's all we have for you today. Thank you so much for joining us. We really enjoy speaking with you. Where can people find you? I believe we're on Twitter, right?

S

Sade Lindsay 1:04:20

I'm always, no not always on Twitter, but I do spend a lot of time now. Actually, I'm tweeting right now. But yes, on Twitter, my first and last name Sade Lindsay there's an underscore at the beginning of it. And I am also have website with obviously all my papers listed for the public to read. I probably shouldn't have said that but



Jenn Tostlebe 1:04:46

We are a fan of that method of dissemination. So.

S

Sade Lindsay 1:04:51

I have a fan of it. as well. I tried to do it like really discreetly, but the point is all We are available on my website to because obviously that matters to me. And so yeah, thank you all so much for this was fun. I've not done something like this. So, I appreciate you all being my first hosts to talk to me about my work on here.



Sade Lindsay 1:05:17

Yeah, I'm sure we won't be the last. So, thank you so much. It was great having you. I'm glad we're finally able to make it happen. Yeah. Hey, thanks for listening.



Jose Sanchez 1:05:27

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Jenn Tostlebe 1:05:37

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Jose Sanchez 1:05:48

Or email us at thecrimacademy@gmail.com See you next time.