Incarcerated High

The Hyper-Incarceration of the Drug Addicted

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Many of our communities are affected by crime. The news broadcasts are riddled with stories of horror, not imagined, not created for our entertainment, and basically, parental discretion should be advised. These stories are so close to us that we can experience them through nearly all of our senses. The Department of Health and Human Services (2008) conducted the National survey on drug use and health (NSDUH). They completed and obtained 67,870 interviews in 2007. Their findings on rates associated with education levels were that among adults aged 18 or older, those with college or university degrees had lower rates of drug dependency or abuse (7.5 percent) than those with just high school diplomas (9.3 percent). Surprisingly, those without high school diplomas (9.8 percent) fared better than those with some college (10.3 percent). Their findings on rates associated with employment status were that there was a higher percentage of unemployed adults (20.0 percent) aged 18 or older classified as dependent or abusive with drugs than fully employed participants (10.1 percent) or part-time participants (10.6 percent).

Further, from the Department of Health and Human Services (2008), in 2007, the number of people aged 12 and older needing treatment for drug addiction or abuse was 7.5 million, and of this population, 1.3 million received treatment at a specialty facility (specialty treatment is defined as treatment received at hospitals – inpatient only), drug or alcohol rehabilitation facilities (inpatient or outpatient), or mental health centers, but it does not include treatment at an emergency room, private doctor's office, self-help groups, prison, jail, or hospital as an outpatient. There were 6.2 million people aged 12 and older needing treatment for drug addiction or abuse but did not receive treatment at a specialty facility. Among people aged 12 or older needing treatment for drug addiction or abuse but did not receive treatment, the most
common reasons for not receiving treatment were; 1) no health coverage and could not afford the cost (34.3 percent); 2) not ready to stop using (31.8 percent); 3) concern that receiving treatment might cause neighbors/community to look upon them negatively (14.4 percent); 4) not knowing where to go for treatment (13.5 percent); 5) a belief in being able to handle the problem without treatment (12.7 percent); and 6) possible negative effect on their jobs (11.7 percent).

According to West and Sabol (2009), Bureau of Justice Statisticians, there were 1,610,584 adult inmates under state or federal jurisdiction at mid-year 2008. Of that population, 40.24 percent are incarcerated in the South region, and 92.81 percent are men. For this study, it is paramount to include the juvenile inmate population. When we do, our prison population increases by 700,616 to 2,311,200, and of that population, 34.92 percent are White, 39.54 percent are Black, and 19.92 are Hispanic. Further analysis of this data shows the Black men population to be higher than any other group between the ages of 18 and 39 (which is crucial when we look at how this affects employment); however, when we look at the inmate population per 100,000 U.S. residents, the number of Black men inmates dominates in all age categories. The overall inmate population estimate for Black men per 100,000 U.S. residents for mid-year 2008 is 4,777 compared to 727 for White men and 1,760 for Hispanic men. Black women dominate in their respective categories as well.

We find 20,245 incarcerated in Georgia (Georgia Department of Corrections 2008). Of males disclosing their race (17,936 of 20,139), 62.77 percent are Black, 37.0 percent are White, and 4.92 percent are Hispanics. Of females disclosing their race (2,203 of 20,139), 42.26 percent are Black, and 57.42 percent are White. Strikingly, of those reporting employment at entry to prison (16,788 of 20,245), 55.41 percent disclosed being fully employed and of those offering
their socioeconomic status at intake (19,436 of 20,245), 50 percent report being middle class. The last statistic is interesting, if not questionable, since of men reporting their highest grade level attained (17,523 of 19,617), of which grade ten is the median, and of women reporting their highest grade level attained (2,094 of 19,617), of which the median is grade eleven. Of Georgia’s total inmate population (20,245), 14,088 (69.60 percent) report either “Drug Only,” “Alcohol Only,” or “Drugs and Alcohol” histories. We find evidence of intergenerational substance abuse in data provided by Mumola and Karberg (2006) where in 2004, 13.9 percent of state and 10 percent of federal inmates report having parents/guardians with “Both Alcohol and Drug” histories. They also found that 642,500 of 1,143,400 (2004 population) reported being either dependent or abusing drugs twelve months prior to admission. In fact, of that same 2004 population, 17 percent of state and 18 percent of federal inmates report that their current crime was committed to get money for drugs.

These statistics show that there is a significant USA population addicted or abusive with drugs, majority of them do not receive treatment, and majority of those that do not receive treatment cite the inability to afford treatment as their reason for not receiving treatment. Therefore, they go on to bitter ends. Furthermore, the prison population in the United States of America is unusually large, disproportionately Black, male, and under educated. Gibbs (1986) and Anderson (1999) write that the young Black’s exposure to the criminal justice system is early, extensive, intensive, and recidivistic due to a lacking in education and employment. As a result, their future for upward mobility is dismal. Alienated, their lifestyles are antisocial, addictive, exploitive, confrontational, and risky; however, they are socially, economically, and politically reinforced by our society. This population abandons mainstream institutions and turns to an underground economy – specifically, the drug trade (Anderson 1999, Royster 2003). Their
communities become more distressed and its population adapt with many forms of desperation. Anderson continues with depictions of how the drug industry evolves. In an attempt to maintain economically, one starts selling drugs and encourages others to get involved (even family members). Some make it, but sadly some do not – they die or they become hopelessly addicted (Anderson 1999).

The intent of this paper is to examine systems of social inequality in order to raise awareness of how these systems are constructed and how dominance attitudes affect laws and policies of the criminal justice system as it relates to the drug addicted offender. I would like to propose that study on this problem is sociologically significant enough to invoke sub-disciplines (sociology of education, sociology of law, and the sociology of knowledge). To be clear, I argue the problem to be nurturing of structural barriers that incubate a perfect climate for deviant behaviors and as a result, addicted Black Americans are finding themselves incarcerated in extraordinary numbers therefore, I posit the thesis that systems of inequality are institutional, social constructs influencing laws and policy that have targeted the drug addicted of marginalized groups, and as a result, widens socioeconomic gulfs.

*Inequality and Stratification*

For this study, Harold Kerbo (2003) has been strongly relied upon for the definitions of social inequality and social stratification. He argues that a necessary precondition for social inequality is social differentiation – identifying distinct individual qualities and social roles for members of a particular society. He goes on to suggest that people are differentiated by sex, size, strength, et cetera, and by social roles, work tasks, or occupations. This happens in varying degrees depending on a society’s complexities. This sets the stage, Kerbo continues, for some
in a society to have unequal access to limited and valued resources, services, and positions. This is social inequality that emerges in terms of where one is positioned on the social structure. There are two reasons for this phenomenon; 1) because humans attach value to events and things, social evaluation is applied to differences ranked from inferior to superior creating social inequality in terms of prestige and honor, and 2) roles and positions provide opportunities to acquire more goods and services. Social stratification is the result of hardened systems of social inequality – better known as institutionalized inequality where a system of social relationships determines who gets what and why.

Davis and Moore’s (1947) article speaks to the functional necessity of social stratification. They argue that social inequality, as a device, evolves unconsciously and society uses it to make sure positions of importance are occupied with the most qualified people. Their argument intensifies with claim that society’s responsibility is to motivate qualifying members of that society to desire these positions and then coerce them to perform their tasks with rewards. These rewards and their distribution, being part of the social order, exacerbate social stratification. Melvin Tumin (1953), on the other hand, takes issue with Davis and Moore’s points. Firstly, Tumin speaks to the empirical invalidity of Davis and Moore’s depiction of “functionally importance” as it relates to where a position and/or person fall on a stratified system. His questions seem to be: 1) How is it determined that one group of positions, people, and/or their sacrifices meet the criteria of being more functional to a society than another group of positions, people, and/or their sacrifices? 2) Why is the motivation for performing tasks in society reduced to rewards or why aren’t other motivations for performing tasks in society, i.e., “joy in work,” “instinct for workmanship,” or “intrinsic work satisfaction,” (all posited by social/economic thinkers) considered in Davis and Moore’s argument?
Whether it is inequality in income, wealth, health, politics, or just basic necessities, we see where the White American has historically stifled other groups in the USA by these orchestrated designs that permeate most institutions. What is disheartening about this is the process of othering that keep some groups up and some groups down (Michael Schwalbe, Sandra Godwin, Daphne Holden, Douglas Schrock, Shealy Thompson, and Michele Wolkomir 2000). Schwalbe, et.al. go on to discuss the creation of identity codes that make it difficult or impossible for the “other” to actualize – the premise behind the White male dominance over both female and African. Crucial to this study is the insidiousness of the dominant group’s interpretation of the adaptive and dissident responses by the subjugated group as an indication that systems of subordination and inequality are legitimate.

Responses to Inequality and Stratification

One of the institutions permeated by inequality ideologies is the criminal justice system. Due to wars on crime and drugs, this institution has been positioned to take advantage of low hanging fruit. Imprisonment has been found to be a common “stopping point” for Black non-college men (Pager 2003, Pettit and Western 2004, Bobo and Thompson 2006), and decisions to incarcerate and/or imprison have been linked to background racism or racist ideologies (Stuntz 1969, Lever 2007). Once incarcerated, the addicted offender becomes even more economically immobile due to hiring practices shaped by inequality ideologies (Wilson 1978, Western 2002, Royster 2003, Pager 2003, Pettit and Western 2004).

Established clearly has been an identification of a disproportionately marginalized group – the Black American. The overall inmate population estimate for Black men per 100,000 U.S. residents for midyear 2008 is nearly 5 percent compared to .7 percent for White men and 1.8
percent for Hispanic men with a substantial number of them having histories of intergenerational addiction (Mumola and Karberg 2006, West and Sabol 2009) one wonders about the cause of this phenomenon and why with this group. We can see and interpret the desired result of othering in alienation. In work, one becomes alienated from himself and his species (Marx 1963). This man transforms from living species life into living individual life – considered by Marx, to be an unnatural state of being. Man not only makes the species; he looks upon himself as universal and free. It is interesting how Marx’s theory interweaves this particular study – he posits this theory of alienation in response to the man working for meager wage – producing for someone who is really getting paid. We must remember that the African brought to the USA did not work for wage; therefore this process had teeth, and evidence of its bite can be seen even today.

Wilson (1990) contributes the thought that the alienated person is externalized meaning that his self definition, self concept, self direction and happiness must be secured from without instead of within. DuBois (1898) refers to it as one looking at self through the eyes of others and measuring “one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (p.3). As a result, this person “actualize[s] and vitalize[s]” an alienated existence filled with “voids, interruptions, insatiable cravings and irrational demands” (Wilson 1990:96). To keep this in context, we must remember that this happens to the marginalized at both the micro and macro levels while the elites support each other in order to maintain their collective impression of competence (Marx 1963, Wilson 1990, Anderson 1999 and Schwalbe, et.al. 2000).

DuBois goes on to say that the history of the African in America has, and will probably continue to be, the struggle to attain self-consciousness and to merge Blackness with being American. There is no need to “Africanize” America. America offers quite a bit to the world, but there is no need to rebuke Blackness. The Black American has and will continue to offer
quite a bit to the world. The Black American has the simple desire to be without having opportunities vaporize by systems of inequality. It is easy to argue that instead of the state shaping laws based solely on the common interests of our society – the consensus view – laws are shaped to protect the interests of the powerful and elite and punishment being largely determined by extralegal variables such as race and social class – the conflict theory view (Sampson and Laub 1993, Mauer 2004). This is an interesting topic in the study of social inequality. This is one of attitudes shaped in White America by centuries of dominance and favor. If whiteness offered one the authority to legally render another enslaved or freed, then one’s whiteness truly became an economically valuable piece of property – property that could be protected by law (Harris 1993). Harris continues to contribute how central protecting whiteness was, and although stealthy, must be protected today because it ensures longevity for the people that stand to benefit the most from it. Today, year 2009, there is a substantial population of White America gazing in amazement as a substantial population of Black America critique whiteness as being a privilege signifier (Hooks 1992). Royster (2003) supports the argument that who you know (social networks) matters when it comes to mobility; however, she goes on to say that Blacks and Whites can know the same contacts, but Whites will still benefit more from this contact than Blacks. This gives the argument of White privilege significance. We will discuss this more while examining inequality in employment. Wellman (1977) contributes that the explanations for inequality based on race are becoming limited and a realization that many Black Americans are in subordinate situations through no fault of their own. Epistemological shifts in how we address of racial inequality in the USA could mean the loss of privileged comfort and rattle an equanimity façade of colorblindness. In the following
sections, we will examine the effects inequality and centuries of attitudinal shaping have on systems of education and employment.

**Education**

Important to keep in mind as we continue is that Africans resisted slavery, and according to Hale-Benson (1982), they showed their resistance in work slowdown, mutilating crops, and misusing furnishings. This behavior was interpreted by the slave holders as shiftlessness and irresponsibility. Also, slave holders agreed that thinking slaves were potential rebellious slaves, so *teaching* slaves became illegal. Upon their release from bondage, the yearning for learning became second to acquiring land. Reading, writing and *ciphering* made up the curriculum all over the south. The Freedman’s Bureau opened approximately four thousand schools until they were shut down due to a lack of funding. This organization was established in the War Department by an act on March 3, 1865, to supervise all relief and educational activities relating to refugees and freed men (Young 2001). Richard Kluger (1976) quotes Gunnar Myrdal from his amazing 1944 work, *An American Dilemma*, where he points out to the world that:

The whole system of discrimination in education in the [America] South is not only tremendously harmful to the Negroes, but it is flagrantly illegal and can easily be so proven in the courts. (P. 256)

As noted earlier, grade ten is the median grade level attained by men incarcerated in the State of Georgia, and grade eleven is the median grade level attained by women. This group is not only dropping out of our systems of education, according to the Georgia Department of Corrections (2008), they are becoming addicted (69.60 percent of the Georgia prison population). Being that the prison population is disproportionately Black, one can infer that the system of education fails the population of this study, which maintains the consistency of the
themes presented earlier in this paper. Systems of inequality are institutional, social construct influencing laws and policy in education that have disempowered marginalized groups, and as a result, widened socioeconomic gulfs.

American schools integrated long enough for those infected by it to migrate to where they could regroup or recover from it. As the Black American in-migrated, the other group would out-migrate, which was the trend in the early sixties. As the Black American became more middle class, they out-migrated forcing the other group to out-migrate further. Here we begin to see the “slight-of-hand” in the system of education. What America experienced, although brief and superficial, was integration. It quickly became obvious that segregation and inequality in the education systems would need disguise. In the onset of integration, Black Americans were matriculating in better facilities with better equipment but eventually, this migrating trend created shifts of funding, and what was once sufficient turned to dilapidation (Anderson 1994). Timberlake (2007) found that a number of Black Americans are experiencing upward mobility and do not live in poor neighborhoods, and could live in even better neighborhoods, but do not because of racial discrimination in urban housing markets.

These stratifying shifts mentioned above created isolated disadvantaged neighborhoods with the exception of a few Black middle class neighborhoods, which brings into question the effect that neighborhood disorganization has on educational achievement. Although not fully empirically explored, it is important for us to develop an understanding of these influences on educational achievement and behavior (Ainsworth 2002; Teasdale and Silver 2009). Although Teasdale and Silver’s explanation has more to do with criminal behavior, it is important to
interweave their position with Ainsworth’s regarding education as it may be safe to assert that it
takes some degree of self-control to attain academic achievement.

Turner (1960) explains contest mobility and sponsored mobility systems where with the
former, an elite status would be the prize of a contest governed by rules of “fair play,” and with
the latter, elite status is given based on some criterion and cannot be dislodged. His study was
of systems in the USA (contest mobility) versus English (sponsored mobility) systems. Turner
builds his argument upon the framework that there should be more of a focus on modes of
mobility versus the extent of mobility. However, one can easily infer from his article that the
systems of the USA could involve both contest and sponsored mobility. An elite group exists in
the USA, and they posture their young to receive the same life of advantage that was passed on
to them (Brooks 2000).

Hale-Benson (1982) suggest that there are three ideal components for curriculum for
Black children; 1) building an accurate foundation of historical and political analysis of Black
people in the USA and of the world, 2) rethinking methods for educating Black children -
curriculum has been constructed around and/or from within the hegemonic ideology that has
been determined suspect, and 3) abandoning mediocrity – the Black in the USA must maintain
peak performance just to compete with the White that maintains average performance (Hale-
Benson 1982; Gibbs 1988; Swain 2006). Hale-Benson goes on to say that much of the push back
on affirmative action programs has been from Whites believing that Blacks are given preferential
treatment. However, there are also those that believe affirmative action does quite a bit to
reinforce the harmful self-images of not being able to make it unattended – many of these images
are perpetuated by well-intentioned, yet “miseducated” teachers (Woodson 1992; Swain 2006).
Woodson speaks best to attitudinal responses by both the privileged and underprivileged as it relates to education. He says that those taught by the oppressor are not equipped to seek liberation until they recover from the system of which they have been taught. They often come from under this system more like the oppressor than the oppressor. He goes on to say that when you control a person’s thinking; you do not have to worry about their actions. If that person is taught to accept inferiority, he will seek it for himself.

Employment

Royster (2003) found in her study that White and Black men could receive the same vocational training, yet in seeking employment, Whites were 1) about three times more likely than Blacks to have favorable “school-to-work” experiences; 2) able to make stable trajectories within their vocations and/or able to successfully switch fields while Blacks were often forced to abandon their original trades. She also found it inaccurate to blame Black men for their labor difficulties being that hers and many other social scientists see racism continuing to limit life chances of “moderately educated” Black men (185). Stereotyping of Black people has been consistent over the years, particularly as it relates to hiring and mobility. It has been found that Black males without criminal histories are not considered for employment as often as White males who do have criminal histories (Pager 2003, Roscigno 2007). Discriminatory practices are very much a part of immobilizing Black men and women.

Because of poor life chances, many Black men are opting for illegal wage earnings, and as a result, many get caught and incarcerated, and many become addicted. Important to mention in this section is the fact that the unemployment rates most commonly referenced are skewed as they do not include the imprisoned, the jailed, or the discouraged (Western and Pettit 2000,
Incarcerated High: The Hyper-Incarceration of the Addicted

Western 2001, Royster 2003). An already marginalized population, poor and undereducated Black people, is further immobilized by the mark of incarceration (Berk and Rossi 1980, Pager 2003, Visher and Travis 2003, Pettit and Western 2004, Bobo and Thompson 2006, Western, Kleykamp, and Rosenfeld 2006). Bobo discloses that an already-low fourteen percent of Blacks without criminal histories receive callbacks for employment. Only five percent of those with criminal histories receive callbacks. Failure to successfully reenter their communities can be attributed to an accelerated attachment of the offender to the deviant mindset, bitterness, and a detachment from the world as it is at the time of the offender’s release (Visher and Travis 2003). We must keep in mind that these figures do not tell the story of the addicted offender reentering the community. Considering the communities from which the offender comes, one wonders if there should be more of an effort to protect the offender upon reentry. Three of the major challenges for successful reentry are housing, employment, and substance abuse/mental health (Roman and Travis 2004, Wodahl 2006). It is important to remember that the ex-offender shares these challenges with the communities to which they return. Until recently, thoughts about an ex-offender’s reentry into his/her community by the community have been virtually nonexistent (Immerwahr and Johnson 2002). Hagan and Dinovitzer (1999) offer critical information on the costs of imprisonment. They write that imprisonment affects human and social capital of the incarcerated, their families, and their communities. The innocent victims are their children who suffer emotionally and behaviorally as a result of losing a parent in this way.

**Conclusion**

There is a significant number of people addicted or abusive with drugs. Majority of them do not receive treatment, and majority of those that do not receive treatment cite the inability to
afford treatment as their reason for not receiving treatment. Furthermore, the prison population in the United States of America is unusually large, disproportionately containing under-educated Black males. Examining the literature has provided substantial evidence that systems of inequality have been developed, nurtured, and permeate systems of education, employment and the criminal justice system. Subliminal negative attitudes toward the Black American perpetuate these systems of privilege and of inequality. As stated early in this paper, I would like to propose that study on this problem is sociologically significant enough to invoke sociology of education and sociology of law for obvious reasons, for reasons that might not be so obvious, sociology of knowledge.
Resources


