



*Research Articles*

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## **Family and Friends in Uniform: The Effect of Close Relationships on CJ Major Selection Among Diverse Students in Urban Colleges**

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*The CJ major itself is one of the top 10 most awarded majors in the United States.  
A sizable percentage of these enrollees are students of color.*

**W**ith healthy employment growth projected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2019) in many criminal justice-related careers like police, private detectives, security, paralegals, and forensic science technicians, tens of thousands of students enroll in a criminal justice (CJ) major program every year. The CJ major itself is one of the top 10 most-awarded majors in the United States. A sizeable percentage of these enrollees are students of color – primarily, Black and Hispanics – in two and four year urban colleges, who in some instances comprise the majority of the student body of the institution.<sup>1</sup> Yet, with a few exceptions (Gabbidon, Penn, & Richards, 2003; Schanz, 2012), CJ students of color have received little attention in the scholarly literature. This is a considerable omission due to the sheer size of their presence not only as CJ students, but as professionals in the CJ system. In many urban law enforcement agencies (i.e., NYPD or LAPD), Whites make up fewer than 50% of the employees. This can also be seen in corrections, where in 2017, close to half of bailiffs, corrections officers, and jailers were Black, Hispanic, or Asian (BLS 2019). The lack of attention towards minorities is problematic not only because of their robust representation in CJ careers, but because the nature of work within CJ involves large

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<sup>1</sup> At one large criminal justice-focused college, John Jay College (City University of New York), for instance, 74% of the students in their Criminal Justice or Criminology major are Black, Hispanic, or Asian. Asians, however, are underrepresented in Criminal Justice programs compared to their prevalence in the student body as a whole, an area that merits further investigation.

amounts of discretion, with decisions impacting the lives of millions of individuals and their communities. Understanding the backgrounds, experiences, and motives of these students is therefore crucial.

As professors in CJ programs in diverse urban colleges, we wanted to rectify this omission. We started with a paradox: Black and Hispanic people are disproportionately affected by zero-tolerance policing and the ravages of mass incarceration; they are more likely to be victims of excessive force and recipients of longer sentences for the same crimes as Whites (Alexander, 2010). Yet, CJ program rosters swell with students in this demographic, many eager to work in law enforcement and corrections. Why, given this puzzle, are these students seemingly ignored in the literature? We suspect that socially dichotomizing narratives play an important role. We are socialized to “see” Black and Brown people as victims of the system, ignoring their work experience or desire to work within CJ careers since such experience or desires do not fit neatly into a dualist paradigm. Complex realities and positionalities are ignored.

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In probing the complex relationships with the CJ system of urban students of color, we previously found that an often-overlooked variable – victimization – had an important role to play in both their selection of a CJ major and their motivations for a CJ career (Eren, Leyro, & Disha, 2019). In this study, we extend our analysis of these students by examining the influence upon them of knowing someone – in their family, extended family, and network of close friends – who works in a criminal justice profession. The questions guiding our research are as follows: What is the prevalence of students who have family and close friends work within the criminal justice system? Of those who do, how many cite their influence on the selection of a CJ major? What is the overlap between students who have family/friends who work *within* the CJ system and those who have had themselves, family, or friends arrested *by* the CJ system? Last, how do students who have someone work in the CJ system differ from students who have no ties to that system?

Answers to these questions are crucial for adult educators working with thousands of CJ students of color. Instructors’ preconceptions of student backgrounds on the basis of race and ethnicity may guide their presentations and lead to faulty assumptions. Courtright and Mackey (2004, pg. 313) cited an editor at the *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, Prabha Unnithan: “I would like for us to learn more *about* our students, such that we, as instructors, are in a position to serve them better.” To that end, we see our work as having a twofold purpose. First, it endeavors to present these students as the complex individuals embedded in complex communities which they are, rather than the caricatures to which simple narratives on the left and right reduce them. They have intersecting networks with CJ professionals and those affected by the system, both groups of which can impact them profoundly. Second, it offers the opportunity to use this information in devising pedagogical strategies that foster deep dialogues on concepts of justice in the context of students’ lived experiences, and to promote social justice conversations within these students’ networks.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The foundational literature for this paper is located at the intersection of two broad areas of study. The first explores family and network dynamics that affect young peoples’ choice of career paths. The second examines CJ students as a group with distinct social characteristics. Our paper synthesizes research in these broad areas by investigating how one feature of CJ students – a family/friend network connection to the CJ system – guides their educational choices and distinguishes them from other CJ students who lack these connections.

## Family Influence on College and Occupation

There is a sizeable literature on intergenerational occupational transmission, e.g. the ways in which family members may “pass down” an occupation to their children. Job inheritance occurs in a wide range of fields such as entrepreneurs (Hisrich & Brush, 1986), lawyers (Laband & Lentz, 1992), doctors (Lentz & Laband, 1989), engineers (Jacobs, Ahman, and Sax, 2017), scientific researchers (Sikora & Pokropek, 2012), or primary school teachers (Gubler, Biemann, & Herzog, 2017). The general consensus from these studies is that parents are of the greatest importance. Children of parents occupying a certain profession are more likely to choose that profession than children who do not have parents within a given profession. Often, career choices are situated within the context of parent-child relationships. Career transmission rests on several mechanisms such as the anticipation of benefits (including nepotism) from parents’ connections, information sharing and advice that can reduce the time/effort put into pursuing a path, and the pressure young people feel while under the guardianship of their parents (Knoll, Riedel, & Schlenker, 2013). Regardless of the mechanisms, researchers in this line of work argue there is a “wage premium” where children earn more by adopting a parent’s occupation due to the ease – a “decreased cost” – with which they can acquire the necessary human capital to succeed in their fields (Chevalier, 2001; Chen, Gordanier, & Ozturk, 2017; Lentz & Laband, 1989).

While frequently accepted, explanations of parental occupational transmission are not without challenges. One point of critique posits that the advantages of transmission are career-specific. There may be a decreased cost to the child for entering into a career like medicine, where favoritism in admissions plays a role (Lentz & Laband, 1989), but it’s difficult to generalize as children of teachers lack opportunity costs for not following their parents’ careers (Gubler, Biemann, & Herzog, 2017). Another critique points to the neglect of affective components. A study of 260 undergraduates concluded that in addition to instrumental reasons for occupational transmission, emotional factors were frequently implicated in the intentions to work in parents’ occupations (Oren, Caduri, & Tziner, 2013). A third critique highlights the role of gender differences. Children do not follow mothers and fathers in the same way. Those who grow up without a father in youth are less likely to experience occupational transmission (Knowell, Riedel, & Schlenker, 2013). Similarly, Chevalier (2001) found that 10% of UK graduates followed in their father’s occupation and about 30% in their father’s general field of work, with many children garnering a wage premium. However, such a premium was not evident for women who entered their fathers’ occupations.

While parental occupational transmission is undeniable, researchers note that parents are not the only significant figures in the adolescents’ decision-making about education and careers. Teenagers “may be influenced by parents, peers, and the broader community” (Oren, Caduri, & Tziner, 2013, pg. 558). Although researchers who analyze peer influence generally conclude that adolescents are less influenced by peers than parents, peers become more prominent when the parent is negative or unsupportive (Alika, 2012).

Beyond direct occupational transmission, adolescents look to other family members when making decisions about post-secondary education and careers. Studies have found that family members are the primary influence for students’ post-secondary educational aspirations (Oymak & Hudson, 2018). Looking at extended family networks may be especially relevant for non-White, Black and Latino communities. Dilworth-Anderson (1992, pg.29) observes “the traditional Black communities define family relationally. Although most kin are related by blood, this is not a requisite. Family membership is not determined only by blood but also by the nature of the relationship between individuals. Fictive kin can, therefore, be as important in the Black community as those related by blood.” This extended kinship network has also been documented among Latino groups like Puerto Ricans (Jatters, Taylor, & Jayakody, 1994) or Caribbean Black immigrants (Taylor, Brown, Lincole, & Chatters, 2017). Thus, strictly focusing on parental

influences that stem from a primarily White nuclear family structure may be insufficient as extended family features, more prevalent in Black and Latino families, could affect outcomes.

## Criminal Justice Majors and their Motives

Research on CJ majors, as a subset of undergraduate students, has grown in multiple directions over the last two decades. Some studies focus on differences and find that CJ students favor more punitive attitudes (Courtright, Mackey, & Packard, 2005; Lambert, 2004), authoritarianism (Owen & Wagner, 2008), or homophobia (Cannon, 2005) than other undergraduate majors. A group of researchers have looked at media effects on choice and expectations from a CJ major (Barthe, Leon, & Laetano, 2013; Saver, Saver, and Dobbs, 2010). Another constellation of studies examines sociological characteristics of CJ majors (Courtright & Mackey, 2004; Gabbidon, Penn, & Richards, 2003; Krimmel & Tartaro, 1999; Schanz, 2012; Yim, 2009). Overall, these studies find racial and gender differences with respect to goals and aspirations of CJ majors.

Studies of dynamics among families with law enforcement or corrections officers as parents emphasize the degree of stress these occupations convey to children, spouses, or self (Arredondo et al., 2002), but have, for the most part, ignored looking at occupational transmission or how having a parent or family member in a CJ profession impacts children's choice of major and career. An early article (Lester, 1982) found that in contrast to other careers, family/friends were not a primary reason for entering the CJ profession; pay, security, and service were. However, in a more contemporary study of 220 police-track university students, parental influence was the second reason cited by males and the first reason cited by female participants (Tarnig et al., 2009).

Acknowledging that family and peer influences are affected by demographic considerations, researchers have examined racial and gender differences in family/friends' impact on CJ career and major selection. Most analyses have focused on race in policing careers. Early work (Ermer, 1978; Lester, 1983) found White respondents who had family members as police officers were more likely to be influenced by them than Black respondents with family members in the same profession. Black students often thought their parents would disapprove of a law enforcement path (Kaminski, 1993). Krimmel and Tartaro's (1999) exploratory study of 400 students, in addition to questions on family/friends influence towards a CJ major, asked whether either the student's mother or father was a police officer (excluding other categories of criminal justice professionals). Breaking down the responses by race, they found non-Whites were less likely than Whites to be influenced by family or high school peers. The only study (Gabbidon et al., 2003) that contradicts the previous outcomes finds significant differences between students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). HBCU students registered more (not less) influence from family members for selecting CJ as a major.

## Synthesizing Family Influence on Criminal Justice Majors

First, there is little, and often ambiguous scholarship, on why individuals enter in the CJ professions of policing, corrections, or similar fields (Schlosser, Safran, & Sbaratta, 2010). As evident in the literature, research on the influence of family/peers on career selection is at odds with the limited work on parent/peer influences towards a specifically CJ career. Most research on occupational transmission, at large, points to a strong parental/family effect. Yet, most work on CJ majors suggests a more ambiguous role, where divergent, incompatible effects are common. In this study, we hope to provide a resolution for this discrepancy by not focusing on discrete careers in CJ, but on the decision to enter the CJ major, which paves the ground for the pursuit of any of those careers. Since CJ careers are numerous and expanding, if

family/peer influence exists, it may be more likely to be evidenced in the pursuit of a college major and a broad field than a specific career.

Second, most studies on CJ career transmission and the influence of family and friends have focused on policing. They tend to bypass and ignore other CJ career occupations. We specifically ask participants if they know someone close to them in *any* CJ field. Since we don't ask about specific CJ careers, our interests are broad: we want to document the extent of, and how connections to someone in any CJ line of work affect the student's choice of a CJ college major.

Third, students of color in CJ studies are not examined as rigorously as they should be. In many studies, they are underrepresented. We go the opposite route. We focus on schools where they are the majority in terms of numeric size. As minority, mostly Black and Latino, students have more extended family networks, we look at the combined effect of parent, extended family, and peer influences on CJ majors.

Last, we want to show not only that students in a CJ major at diverse urban colleges are influenced in their decision-making but demonstrate they “think differently” due to those influences. To be more specific, we hypothesize: 1) students with CJ connections – someone working in a CJ field – have different motivations for entering into the major than those who do not, and 2) given the prominence of racial and gender differences, female and non-White students will have different motivations from males and White students.

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## METHODS

### Study Site and Participants

This study is part of a larger data collection effort. Initially, we examined the effects of victimization on motivation for entry into the CJ major and careers (Eren, Leyro, & Disha, 2019) here, we explore the effects of CJ connections. The data were obtained during the Fall 2017 – Spring 2018 semesters using a convenience sample of students at two urban, 2-year colleges in the Northeast. The colleges have over 20,000 students each with similar majority-minority demographic profiles (fewer than 10% of students are White). All participants were criminal justice majors enrolled in introductory-level CJ courses.<sup>2</sup> In total, 371 participants completed usable surveys. With respect to demographics, 54% were male and 45% female; 59% Hispanic/Latino, 21% Black, 7% White, and 7% Asian; 34% first generation immigrants, 41% second generation, and 24% third generation or later; 75% heterosexual and 20%, LGBTQ+.

### Study Instrument

The instrument was a survey which combined 70 qualitative and quantitative questions. The survey first addressed questions about the students' socio-demographic background. Then, we proceeded with

<sup>2</sup>After being read a consent script in class, students were given the choice to fill out a paper survey which contained no identifying information to ensure anonymity. Almost all students who received the survey completed them, with fewer than five returning blank surveys.

questions on our variables of interest. With respect to independent variables probed in this paper, a section focused on students' degree of legal involvement – students' relationships with people who have been arrested (partially incorporated into this project); and a third measured students' professional CJ connections. Here, we are addressing reasons for students' choice of CJ as a college major. The survey was designed to replicate Krimmel and Tartaro's (1999) seminal work, albeit extended to capture the concepts behind our measures.

### Variable Descriptions: Independent Variable

The main independent variable is CJ connections – having a family member or close friend who works or has worked in a CJ profession (in policing, courts, corrections, or juvenile justice). This is a dichotomous, composite variable that has been constructed from answers to the three questions below.

1. Has anyone in your immediate family (mother/father/brother/sister) ever worked or currently works as a criminal justice professional (e.g. law enforcement, the courts, or corrections, including juvenile justice)?
2. Has anyone in your extended family (grandmother/grandfather/aunt/uncle/cousin) ever worked or currently works as a criminal justice professional (e.g. law enforcement, the courts, or corrections, including juvenile justice)?
3. Have any of your close friends ever worked or currently work as a criminal justice professional (e.g., law enforcement, the courts, or corrections, including juvenile justice)?

### Variable Descriptions: Dependent Variable

We explored the effects of CJ connections on reasons for choice of CJ as a college major. We asked: In thinking about your reasons for selecting your college major, please indicate whether you (5) strongly agree, (4) agree, (3) neither agree, nor disagree, (2) disagree, or (1) strongly disagree with the following statements.

1. I was influenced by a TV program or programs (i.e., CSI, Law and Order, Criminal Minds, etc.).
2. I thought the course content was easier than other majors.
3. I thought the subject matter was very interesting or exciting.
4. I thought the subject matter was relevant to the real world.
5. I was influenced by a family or friend's victimization to do so.
6. I was influenced by my involvement with the criminal justice system.
7. I was influenced by a family member's involvement with the criminal justice system.
8. I was influenced by a friend's involvement with the criminal justice system.
9. I was influenced by a family member to do so.
10. I was influenced by a family member who has worked in the criminal justice system to do so.
11. I was influenced by a family friend who has worked in the criminal justice system to do so.

At the end of these questions, we ask students to clarify/state: Which of the above factors would you say was most important in your major selection?

The first four statements are taken from Krimmel and Tartaro, (1999) and we test whether our study replicates. The fifth measures the influence of victimization; six through eight, the influence of legal involvement; and nine through eleven, the influence of family/friends in the students' major selection. The last section enables the students to qualitatively express their thoughts behind the choice of major. Throughout this paper, we investigate how these influences vary by group: by those who do and those who do not have connections to the CJ system.

## Variable Descriptions: Control Variable

We control for traditional demographic indicators: sex/gender, race/ethnicity, and immigration status. Sex/gender is a dichotomous variable with two categories: males and females. Race/ethnicity is a nominal variable with four categories: White, Asian, Hispanic, and Black. Immigration status is also a nominal variable with three options: 3rd generation, 2nd generation, and 1st generation immigrants. We explore how reasons behind the selection of a CJ major vary by these demographic indicators.

## Statistical Analysis

We engage in descriptive and inferential statistics. In the descriptives, we document the extent of CJ connections and how CJ connections vary by demographic indicators, as well as the subjects' connections with those who have been involved in the criminal justice system through an arrest or who know someone close to them who has been arrested. For the inferential component, we rely on bivariate and ordinal regression models. Because we analyze the effect of CJ connections on ordinal outcomes – reasons for CJ major measured on a Likert-scale from 1 to 5 –the proper bivariate measure to assess the effect of two separate groups (CJ connections and no CJ connections) on ordinal outcomes is the Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney (WMW) rank-sum test (Mann & Whitney, 1947; Wilcoxon, 1945). We report the WMW U-statistic, generate a z-score which tells us the difference between the two groups, and test the probability a randomly selected participant from the group with CJ connections is different with respect to reasons behind the choice of CJ as a college major than a participant from the group with no CJ connections.

Since bivariate analysis does not take into account the role of intervening variables, we rely on ordered logit regressions to ensure validity (Long & Freese, 2014). Ordered logit regression models generate coefficients against a reference category. Our models have one independent and three control variables. For CJ connections – the main explanatory variable – the participants with no CJ connections represent the reference category. For sex, the reference is male participants. For race/ethnicity, we selected White; for immigration, the third generation or later. The coefficients indicate the odds that a group ranks higher or lower than the reference category on a particular outcome – reasons for CJ as a major.

## FINDINGS

**W**e break down the findings in three parts. First, we present descriptive statistics that show the prevalence of CJ connections among the study participants. Second, we analyze the effect of CJ connections on the reasons behind the CJ choice of major using bivariate and ordered logistic regression models. In the last part, to highlight the participants' thoughts, we supplement quantitative findings with qualitative data.

## Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics on the extent of CJ connections in the study sample. If we focus only on family networks, 40% of the study participants have a family or extended family member work in a CJ profession. If we include family and peer networks, over 57% of the sample report knowing someone who works in a CJ field.

Table 1

*Family, Extended Family, and Friends in a CJ Career (N=371)*

Independent Variable Categories	N	%
Family/Extended Family Work in a CJ-Related Field		
No One Works in a CJ-Related Field	221	60.0
Someone Works in a CJ-Related Field	150	40.0
Family/Extended Family/Friend Work in a CJ-Related Field		
No One Works in a CJ-Related Field	159	42.9
Someone Works in a CJ-Related Field	212	57.1

In Table 2, we disaggregate this information by traditional demographic categories (gender, race/ethnicity, immigration status, sexual orientation). In our sample, Asian students report the fewest CJ connections, with slightly above 42% knowing someone close to them in a CJ field. All other groups report substantial connections, with 3<sup>rd</sup> generation (65%) and our small sample of White (63%) participants leading the way.

Table 2

*Demographic and CJ Work Connections in Survey Participants (N=371)*

	No Connections		Connections	
	N	%	N	%
Sex/Gender Identification				
Males	68	40.7	99	59.3
Females	88	44.2	111	55.8
Other	2	66.7	1	33.3
Racial/Ethnic Affiliation				
White	10	37.0	17	63.0
Black	31	39.7	47	60.3
Hispanic	93	42.3	127	57.7
Asian	15	57.7	11	42.3
Other	9	47.4	10	52.6
Immigration Status				
1 <sup>st</sup> Generation	55	43.3	72	56.7
2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation	70	46.4	81	53.6
3 <sup>rd</sup> Generation or later	31	34.8	58	65.2
Sexual Orientation				
Heterosexual	118	42.1	162	57.9
LGBTQ+	33	44.0	42	56.0

In Table 3, we want to show the complexity of our study participants.. Their experiences with a system they aim to be a part of are challenging. The first part of Table 3, indicates that close to 63% of the sample is

involved or knows someone (family or friend) close who is legally involved (arrested) in the system. The second part of Table 3 combines CJ connections with CJ involvement. The overlap between the two categories is noteworthy. As shown, only slightly less than 20% of the sample is not connected to or affected by the CJ system. About 20% know someone who works in the system but have no legal involvements with the system. Close to 25% report the opposite; they have no CJ connections but know someone arrested by the system. Finally, nearly 40% experience (what we consider) an intriguing duality; they know someone working in the system while simultaneously having someone close apprehended by that system.

Table 3

*Overlap between Knowing a CJ Professional and CJ Involvement of Subjects (N=371)*

Variables	N	%
<b>Self/Family/Friend Involved/Entangled with the CJ System</b>		
No One Involved	138	37.2
Someone Involved	233	62.8
<b>Work in a CJ-Related Field and Involved with the CJ System</b>		
No Work, No Involvement	69	18.6
Work, No Involvement	69	18.6
No Work, Involvement	90	24.3
Work, Involvement	143	38.5

### Inferential Statistics

**Bivariate Analysis.** In Table 4, we present findings from bivariate analyses. Is there a correlation between CJ connections and reasons for choosing CJ as a college major? As observed from the table, there is no significant relationship between those with CJ connections and those without such connections on the influence of TV programs, easy course content, interesting, or relevant subject matter. Victimization also does not vary across the levels of the independent variable; participants with CJ connections and those without connections are similarly ranked on the influence of family/friend victimization towards choosing the CJ major. The correlations are significant with legal involvement and family influences. Participants with CJ connections are more likely to rank higher – to agree with the statements that personal ( $U = 12,440, p < .01$ ), family ( $U = 11,695, p < .001$ ), or friend ( $U = 11,958, p < .001$ ) legal involvements push them towards the major – than participants with no CJ connections. The probability that a randomly selected participant in the CJ connected group ranks higher than a random participant in the non-CJ connected group with respect to personal, family, or friend involvement is 59%, 62%, and 60%, respectively.

A similar pattern holds for family influences. There is a high degree of correlation between those with CJ connections and the influence those connections exert towards the choice of CJ as a college major.<sup>3</sup> Students with CJ connections are more influenced by family members ( $U = 11,858, p < .001$ ), by family members who work in the CJ system ( $U = 8,843, p < .001$ ), and friends who also work in the system ( $U = 10,935, p < .001$ ). The probability that individuals with CJ connections will score higher than those without connections is quite high, ranging from 63% to 71%.

<sup>3</sup> Individuals with CJ connections could be the same as individuals with no CJ connections; they could be uninfluenced – choose the major regardless of connections to someone in the CJ field – just as those with no connections do.

Taken together, this table of bivariate correlations shows that family influences are quite prevalent in the choice of college major for those who have professional CJ ties. Furthermore, the correlations indicate that students with connections to someone in the field think differently about the major, and perhaps their future career. Family/friend network members who work in the system are influential but family and friends who have succumbed to the punitive side of the system may be equally relevant. Do these relationships hold when subjected to the more rigorous tests of regression analysis?<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, do sex/gender and racial/ethnicity play an intervening role in choosing CJ as a major?

*Regression Models.* The regression models in Table 5 specify the effect of CJ connections controlling for demographic indicators. As the models show, we find no support for the effects of demographic indicators in our sample. Sex, race, and immigration status do not affect the reasons for choosing CJ as a major. The main independent variable – CJ connections – on the other hand, is statistically significant in every model. Model 1 analyzes 330 cases but explains a little more than 1% of the variance (Pseudo R-Square). Participants with connections are more likely ( $\beta = 0.572$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than participants without connections to choose CJ as a major due to personal, friend, or familial involvement with the law. However, it is difficult to read too much into the finding as the final model fit ( $\chi^2 = 9.87$ ) does not show a significant improvement over a null model with no prediction.

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<sup>4</sup> For the sake of parsimony, regression analysis focuses only on significant bivariate correlations.

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Table 4

*Influences of the CJS Connected and Non-Connected Groups on the Choice of College Major*

Respondents Who...									
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	Total (N)	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U Statistic	Z-Score and Probability: Value
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree				
Major Choice – Influenced by TV Programs									
Connection	42	22	31	41	66	202	176	15,021	0.030
None	29	19	23	30	48	149	175		
Major Choice – Influenced by Easy Course Content									
Connection	82	32	37	23	29	203	185	14,047	1.514
None	69	27	28	16	12	152	169		
Major Choice – Influenced by Interesting/Exciting Subject Matter									
Connection	8	6	15	48	125	202	176	15,095	0.314
None	9	4	10	31	98	152	179		
Major Choice – Influenced by the Relevance of the Subject Matter									
Connection	11	3	21	52	116	203	174	14,627	0.954
None	7	6	14	28	97	152	183		
Major Choice – Influenced by Family or Friend Victimization									
Connection	107	19	31	15	21	193	172	13,946	0.296
None	85	13	21	11	17	147	168		
Major Choice – Influenced by Self Involvement with CJS									
Connection	80	23	38	25	36	202	189	12,440	2.964**
None	89	12	13	8	27	149	158		(59)
Major Choice – Influenced by Family Member Involved with CJS									
Connection	110	23	32	25	15	205	197	11,695	4.570***
None	115	12	15	5	4	151	153		(62)
Major Choice – Influenced by Friend Who Was Involved with CJS									
Connection	111	29	35	12	14	201	192	11,958	3.874***
None	114	11	15	4	6	150	155		(60)
Major Choice – Influenced by Family Member									
Connection	79	20	44	37	27	207	200	11,858	4.314***
None	86	26	22	6	13	153	155		(63)
Major Choice – Influenced by Family Member Who Worked in CJS									
Connection	98	21	29	30	25	203	206	8,843	7.667***
None	126	13	8	0	1	148	134		(71)
Major Choice – Influenced by Family Friend Who Worked in CJS									
Connection	111	31	33	16	14	205	201	10,935	5.610***
None	123	14	11	0	3	151	148		(65)

Note: Significance levels: \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . <sup>a</sup> Probability reported for significant z-scores only.

Table 5

*Ordered Logistic Regression—The Effect of CJ Connections on Choice of Criminal Justice as a College Major*

	Outcome Variables: Reasons for Choice of College Major in Criminal Justice					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
	Self Involvement with CJS	Family Involvement with CJS	Friend Involvement with CJS	Family Influence	Family Influence in CJS	Friend Influence in CJS
Independent Variables						
CJS Connection	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
No Connection	0.572**	1.031***	0.883***	0.871***	2.062***	1.369***
Connection	(0.215)	(0.243)	(0.245)	(0.212)	(0.285)	(0.259)
Control Variables						
Sex						
Male	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Female	0.068	-0.024	0.037	-0.147	-0.182	-0.140
	(0.207)	(0.228)	(0.229)	(0.204)	(0.239)	(0.235)
Race/Ethnicity						
White	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Asian	0.273	0.335	0.007	-0.036	1.015	0.246
	(0.536)	(0.630)	(0.626)	(0.519)	(0.611)	(0.612)
Hispanic	-0.083	0.515	-0.095	0.230	0.548	0.082
	(0.389)	(0.451)	(0.445)	(0.375)	(0.472)	(0.445)
Black	0.048	0.388	-0.014	0.321	0.331	-0.104
	(0.427)	(0.494)	(0.484)	(0.417)	(0.518)	(0.488)
Immigration						
Native Born	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Foreign, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Gen	0.095	-0.131	-0.064	0.026	-0.121	-0.323
	(0.273)	(0.290)	(0.293)	(0.264)	(0.310)	(0.304)
Foreign, 1 <sup>st</sup> Gen	0.364	-0.010	-0.052	-0.039	0.322	-0.082
	(0.282)	(0.303)	(0.305)	(0.275)	(0.316)	(0.310)
Valid Cases	330	332	327	336	329	332
Final Model Fit	9.87	21.11**	14.25*	23.01**	69.01***	33.85***
Pseudo R-Square	0.011	0.028	0.020	0.024	0.090	0.046
Link Function: Logit						

Note: Coefficients reflect the log odds estimates. Standard errors are in parentheses. Reference category – ref. Significance level: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

The most telling story from our findings comes from Models 2 through 6. In Model 2, we analyze 332 valid cases. The final model fit ( $\chi^2 = 21.11$ ,  $p < .01$ ) shows an overall improvement from a base model with no predictors. The model also indicates a slight improvement from the first one by explaining nearly 3% of the variance. Turning the attention towards the main variable of interest, we notice that participants with CJ connections ( $\beta = 1.031$ ,  $p < .001$ ) are more likely to be drawn towards the major if they have family members legally involved in the system. To state more precisely, every unit increase in the CJ connections category (going from 0 to 1; from no CJ connections to CJ connections) increases the odds of moving to a higher level (score) of the ordinal outcome 2.8 times (exponent of  $1.031 = 2.804$ ), while other variables are held constant.<sup>5</sup>

Model 3 follows the same pattern. The final model fit ( $\chi^2 = 14.25$ ,  $p < .05$ ) shows significant improvement over a baseline model. Those with CJ connections ( $\beta = 0.883$ ,  $p < .001$ ) are more likely to enter the major if they have friends involved with the system; the odds of a student with connections choosing the major due to a friend's legal involvement are 2.4 times (exponent of  $0.883 = 2.418$ ) higher than those of a student with no connections.

The last three models shift the emphasis from legal involvement to network influences. All three models offer a better fit ( $\chi^2 = 23.01$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $\chi^2 = 69.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\chi^2 = 33.85$ ,  $p < .001$  for Models 4, 5, and 6, respectively) than null models with no predictors. For students with CJ connections, the family influence ( $\beta = 0.871$ ,  $p < .001$ ) is stronger than for students with no connections (Model 4). The pattern is even more prominent in Model 5. CJ connected students are more attracted towards the major ( $\beta = 2.062$ ,  $p < .001$ ) if the connections stem from a family member; the odds of choosing a major due to a family member who works in the CJ system are a nearly stunning 8 times higher (exponent of  $2.062 = 7.862$ ). In Model 6, the choice of major from influential friends ( $\beta = 1.369$ ,  $p < .001$ ) follows similarly, albeit not with the same strength as the family influence.

Overall, the findings from regression models replicate the bivariate analysis conclusion. Students with professional CJ-connections are differentially motivated than non-connected ones. The connected students are influenced by family and peer networks in CJ occupations but they are also more "sensitive" and more attracted towards the CJ major when they have experiences of legal involvement.

*Students with professional CJ-connections are differently motivated than non-connected ones. The connected students are influenced by family and peer networks in CJ occupations but they are also more "sensitive" and more attracted towards the CJ major when they have experiences of legal involvement.*

## Qualitative Data

242 of our participants answered the open-ended questions. 47 of these -- approximately 20% -- indicated that a family member or friend was a significant-- or indeed the single most important reason for them to enter into the CJ major and pursue a career in CJ. Of these, only 5 cited the influence of a family friend. 18 of the respondents specifically mention that beyond the general influence of family and friends (support, encouragement, or something else), they were heavily influenced by close connections who worked in CJ jobs. In table 6 we present select responses to the open-ended questions about the most important influence on their choice of the CJ Major and career.

<sup>5</sup> The exponent of the parameter estimate (of the log odds coefficient) gives us the odds ratio which offers a more useful and intuitive interpretation of the results.

Table 6

*Influence of Family/Friends on CJ Major Selection*

- 
- I was influenced by a family member—who has worked for the CJS—to do so – my grandfather was a police officer
  - [I was] influenced by family who worked for CJS. It influenced me to enter the criminal justice system because I wanted help people and keep peace in my community
  - My parents were cops in this system, that’s why I like it.
  - My mother is a medical examiner. So in the future, I want to work as a criminal justice professional
  - Seeing my father and my uncles work as a police officer made me want to look more in the field and find what I wanted to be
  - I think by having a family member work in the CJ system it sparked an interest in CJ for me.
  
  - I’ve had a cousin who worked with law enforcement and that really influenced me to want to take criminal justice as my major and some of the things he said stood out to me.
  - My uncle was a NYPD officer, he indirectly influenced me to pursue a career in criminal justice
  - I think it influenced my decision because seeing my father and my uncles work as a police officer made me want to look more in the field and find what I wanted to be
  - I was influenced by a family member (my parents helping me see that being part of the criminal justice can help my future).
  - One of my family members actually pushing me forward on what I want to do
- 

We can see that there is evidence for intergenerational occupational transmission, and clues to the mechanisms behind this. “Seeing my father and my uncles work as a police officer made me want to look more in the field and find what I wanted to be,” one respondent writes. Another notes, “I’ve had a cousin who worked with law enforcement and that really influenced me to want to take criminal justice as my major and some of the things he said stood out to me.” Directly hearing from family members in criminal justice positions has an impact and stimulates curiosity, while at the same time, because family members are in the occupations, practical knowledge of how to enter the fields is also present. For those who stated a more general influence of the family and friends, notable is the support that is expressed for choosing the major. “I was influenced by a family member (my parents helping me see that being part of the criminal justice can help my future),” and “One of my family members actually pushing me forward on what I want to do,” are illustrative statements.

## DISCUSSION

**T**he contemporary roster of CJ students in urban colleges is diverse. It is diverse not only due to the increasing presence of Black and Brown students but, perhaps more notably, due to their experiences. A large quantity of the CJ student bodies surveyed, is victimized (Eren, Leyro, & Disha, 2019), significant numbers have seen someone close to them or have themselves been arrested, and, as this paper clearly demonstrates, a considerable proportion have a network of family, relatives and/or friends work in a CJ field.

The sizeable portion of students who knows someone work in a CJ occupation is significant because it is applicable to students from varied socio-demographic characteristics. More than half of the students in a major demographic category – male or female, majority or minority group (with the exception of Asians), native or foreign born, and heterosexual or LGBTQ – have connections to the institutions of justice. These connections are not straightforward but complex. They overlap with other components. Our sample of

students has links to both sides of the CJ spectrum: they know someone who close to them who works in the CJ system but also someone apprehended by the system.

In addition to providing a clear picture of the student body in urban college settings, we took aim at one component of intricate student experiences – the degree of CJ connections – and investigated how that experience affects a student’s choice of a CJ major. It is clear from the findings that students with links to CJ occupations are distinct from peers with no ties to that line of work. We highlight two main consequences. First, as expected, and in line with contemporary studies in the field (Tarnge et al., 2009), one of the motivations behind the choice of a college major is family/peer influence, with an emphasis of the importance of family, also as has been well-established in the literature. CJ-connected students lean towards the major not only because of TV programs, easy course content, or exciting subject matter, as prior studies have established (Krimmel & Tartaro, 1999): they choose the major also because important figures in their family and (to a lesser degree) peer circles encourage them to pursue this type of education and the future career it entails. In our view, CJ-connected students are not “fooled” into the major by hearsay or media sensationalizing. As research on occupational transmission can attest, those with connections to the field inherit their futures from influential figures who serve as role models or provide the information and connections to succeed.

Second, this work reveals students’ complex, overlapping networks with those within the students as well as those affected by the system may provide a uniquely important juxtaposition of realities that can have an amplification effect. Those with connections to the field are more likely to choose CJ as a major if they know someone close to them, or if they have been arrested. Why would legal involvement be more likely to draw a student with CJ connections towards the major than a student without such connections? We are not entirely sure, and this puzzle speaks to the need for further and more in-depth qualitative study. We conjecture that those with connections have two frames of reference: people working in the CJ system but also friends and relatives involved in the often-heavy hand of the law. Equipped with these dual frames of reference, they are drawn towards the major because (they think) by working for the system, they would be less likely to be victims of it. They see the status enjoyed by those working in the system and the devastation of those entangled in it. It is not a difficult choice to figure out where you want to end up. Becoming educated to work in the CJ system has benefits. At the very least, it shields one from being a casualty of mass incarceration. If this were true, students with professional familial and peer ties to the CJ system are pragmatists who want to follow in family footsteps in the direction of avoiding negative, firsthand experiences with the law. Their aspiration is perhaps an elevated social status amidst limited opportunities in local communities and the likelihood of experiencing arrest and incarceration which is high in Black and Brown communities.

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## Limitations and Future Suggestions

Although the focus of this paper was not on direct occupational transmission *per se*, by focusing on our respondents’ decision to enter the CJ major -- prior to entry into a career-- we are essentially forecasting occupational transmission by intention to work in a general field. Research on occupational transmission differentiates between work in the same occupation and work in the same, general, field of work, and generally does not look at college major selection as merely entering a major does not ensure entry into a related career. We are also unable to measure specific career transmission because the main independent variable was constructed in the most “inclusive” way possible. We asked students if they know someone in the CJ field, not in any specific occupation (i.e., law enforcement, corrections officer) within the field. Future studies examining how family and friends influence the choice of a CJ major or career could

benefit by specifying the independent and outcome measures in more detail to better capture the role of occupational transmission.

Another limitation was the generally quantitative focus. Although we include a brief section of qualitative reports, in-depth qualitative interviews are necessary to tease out how decisions to enter into criminal justice occupations are made. For sensitive topics like parental or peer influence, interviews or focus groups may be more useful than surveys in probing the nuanced dimensions of occupational transmission. What are the conversations among family and friends that provide the basis for interest in the system, the advice given, the networks utilized, and the practical information shared? Importantly, how do those who have connections with those in CJ-professions, those with connections with both professionals and those affected by the CJ system negotiate those realities and relationships? How does one connection “speak” to the other, and affect the students’ sense of justice?

Last, we are also mindful for asking students during their first or second semester of coursework towards the major. It could very well be the case we would not observe differences between CJ connected and non-connected students in more advanced stages of education. More longitudinal studies are recommended as students’ viewpoints may change during their educational progress.

## Conclusions

Criminal justice students of color in urban, particularly 2-year colleges, have been under-studied in spite of their growing influence and entry into CJ professions that are characterized by large amounts of discretion. Many of these students are economically and socially disadvantaged (CCRC, 2019), which exposes them not only to family and friends who may work in the CJ system, but also, as our study shows, to negative experience when they, family and friends may be caught up in the CJ system. These may be incompatible and irreconcilable experiences for students in other majors. These overlapping realities are complicated, and could be paralyzing. They may aim to be participants in a system of justice fully aware they could be deemed a foe to justice by family and friends. This reality also has transformational possibility, as students can see the CJ system from multiple positions, not merely as detached spectators, and bring this awareness to their work.

*...as students can see the CJ system from multiple positions, not merely as detached spectators, and bring this awareness to their work.*

For adult educators of CJ students, we believe the information presented in this article underscores the importance of knowing one’s students has long been argued to be a crucial pedagogical tool for enhancing learning (Woollacott, Booth & Cameron 2014). Vygotsky, for instance, posited that it is necessary for the teacher to interact with the learner in order to first understand the basis of his/her knowledge and understanding of the given topic, to forwarding this knowledge effectively. The National Research Council’s Science Teaching Reconsidered (1997) provides a strong statement on the importance of this knowledge that deserves full quotation:

We should not forget the important effect our students’ backgrounds have on learning. Getting to know students and getting to know about them are important prerequisites for effective teaching, especially since it is becoming increasingly likely that today’s students will differ more in their demographics, preparations, attitudes, and interests.... Teachers who continually try to understand their audiences and to address student interests...Beliefs or preconceived notions about students influence how we teach...Knowledge about

students will enable the teacher to refine lectures, class discussions, comments, illustrations, and activities so that they are more effective learning experiences. References to student interests, backgrounds, knowledge, and even anxieties can make the class seem more personal and the material more accessible (pgs. 55-56).

CJ students of color are complex, not reducible to narratives foisted on them by the right, nor left. They navigate worlds with contradictions that are difficult to negotiate. They may have fathers or mothers who work as police officers and brothers and sisters who may be arrested—indeed our data provides evidence for this overlap, and its impact. They have role models who encourage them, as some of our qualitative responses showed, to pursue an education in criminal justice and others who view the police as a hostile, occupying force. It is possible they could experience victimization, arrest, and later in life be in a position to decide on the lives of others, as the work of Victor Rios (2011) – a gang member turned educator – illustrates. Needless to say, students with these experiences could be challenging for teachers and instructors. Yet, such students present also adult educators with an immense opportunity to understand and engage with them in dialogues around justice and social justice that can have a profound impact on the criminal justice system, as so many of them will enter into related professions. The way in which we do so is open to innumerable possibility, but to even begin in this endeavor, we must first know who they are, and not who we expect them to be.

*CJ students of color are complex, not reducible to narratives foisted on them by the right, nor left. They navigate words with contradictions that are difficult to negotiate.*

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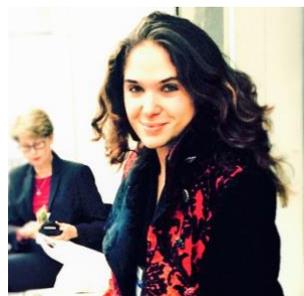
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