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Impact of Incarceration on the Maternal Identities of African American Women

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Abstract

Impact of Incarceration on the Maternal Identities of African American Women

by

Shameka Roshe Davis

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

There are minimal studies that have analyzed the impact and consequences of multiple

incarcerations among African American mothers regarding their maternal identity and

relationships. With this study, how African American women perceive the impact of their

multiple incarcerations, relationships with their children, ability to parent their children,

and how they negotiate their own maternal identity was examined. This study was

completed in Las Vegas, Nevada and involved a multiple case study format and sample

of 12 African American women who have experienced multiple incarcerations and have

already been released from prison. Perspectives of participants were examined through a

sequence of in-depth and semi-structured interviews. Critical criminology and feminist

theory frameworks were used to analyze the data, which consisted of narrative interview

transcripts. Findings from analysis of this research revealed that after enduring multiple

incarcerations, participants experienced significant damage to their maternal identity and

relationships and had to make substantial adjustments to try to reestablish themselves as

maternal figures in the lives of their children. This research project contributes to creating

positive social change by providing enhanced understanding of the negative impacts of

multiple incarcerations on African American women, their maternal identity,

relationships, and ultimately their community, and can guide the development of

supportive programming and policies that will assist mothers with maintaining their

maternal relationships during and after incarceration.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Women represent the fastest growing population of incarcerated individuals. According to Alexander (2012), African American women represent the largest segment of incarcerated females in correctional institutions in the United States (US). African American women are low priority for scholarly researchers, despite this high rate of correctional detainment (Mignon and Ransford, 2012). Compared to any other nation, the US subjects its residents to incarceration at a more prominent rate (Bureau of Prisons, 2015; Carson, 2015; National Women's Law Center, 2012). This study will examine the perceptions of African American women who have experienced multiple incarcerations and how their incarcerations impact their maternal identity and relationships.

During incarceration, imprisoned women abandon their responsibilities relating to their spouses, children, parents, and domestic obligations, resulting in trouble for their community and members of their family (Carson, 2015). Imprisonment reduces relative household income, decreases residential assets, and adds to family separation (Wildeman and Western, 2010). The substantial impact that maternal incarceration has on maternal identity and the family unit suggests that this topic is important and needs examination. Examination of this topic has the potential to influence policy change that can support maternal relationships during incarceration and reintegration.

I address the foundation of the issue in this chapter and present research questions. I survey the theoretical structure of basic criminology and black women's liberation. I also offer definitions. Lastly, I give a synopsis of Chapter 1.

Problem Statement

The problem that was addressed in this study is the impact of multiple incarcerations on the maintenance of maternal relationships by examining lived experiences of African American women who have experienced this. Many studies have examined challenges that incarcerated parents face, and research consistently suggests that there are significant negative consequences involving maternal incarceration; however, few have explored nonviolent female prisoners. This study addresses gaps in literature by exploring the perceptions of African American women regarding their maternal identity and maintenance after experiencing multiple incarcerations. Awareness and understanding regarding how these women negotiate, experience, and view their parental relationships and relative barriers and disruptions created by incarcerations is important and this is an issue that needs to be examined. Increasing societal understanding and awareness of these phenomena can permit the creation of successful maintenance of maternal relationships and reintegration into society. The occurrence of positive social change within the criminal justice system can be a consequence of exposing challenges and barriers caused by multiple incarcerations that African American women experience respective to the maintenance of their parental roles.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study with a multiple case design is to explore the lived experiences of incarcerated African American mothers and examine how they negotiate their mothering roles while incarcerated. The goal was to provide awareness about how these mothers' absences due to their incarcerations impacts their relationships with their children, psychological wellbeing, and ability to negotiate their maternal roles. Providing awareness about the unexamined challenges of African American mothers who are incarcerated is needed. Additionally, by exploring the lived experiences of participating women, I can detail how their viewpoints impact their interactions with their children and family members.

Significance

Through capturing the perceptions and lived experiences of African American women who are examined within this study, their ideas regarding the impacts that their multiple incarcerations have on their ability to parent their children were highlighted, as well as how they negotiate the maternal roles. Information that can be derived from conducting in-depth interviews allows for review and evaluation of policies that increase the likelihood of separation between mothers and children, due to incarceration.

This study will address maternal roles of African American women who have experienced incarceration as well as barriers in terms of maintenance of maternal relationships with their offspring. One of the purposes of this study is to highlight the significant societal implications that maternal incarceration of African American women lead to, in order to result in the development of programming, policies, and applications

that focus on helping this neglected population and their families and benefit the larger

community. In many instances, case studies are highly effective in terms of resulting in

policy change. According to Collins (2012), the case study design is used to explore

issues that are of a complex nature, which subsequently results in reviews of existing

policies. Case studies create opportunities for discussion and examination of social

problems, as well as policy adjustments, while accentuating and promoting examination

of alternative outlooks and norms (Foster & Hagan, 2014).

Increased instances of individuals being removed from their familial systems for

extended time periods results in increased numbers of disrupted families within minority

communities (Ayre, 2012). African American women with substantial histories of

repeated incarceration are removed from mainstream society through punitive processes

of imprisonment and heavily rely on their social networks to support the maintenance of

their maternal roles (Allen et al., 2014). Their social networks serve as liaisons in terms

of visitation and phone calls with their children, as well as providing basic needs for their

children which would likely be otherwise unachievable through any efforts of the mother

(Roberts, 2014).

In 2020, African American women represented the largest number of incarcerated

women within the state of Nevada, which is where this study takes place (Bureau of

Justice Statistics [BJS], 2020). Although African American women are overrepresented

within the criminal justice system, the most frequently committed crimes were nonviolent

offenses and prostitution (Bush, 2012). According to Siegel and Blank (2010), in most

state jurisdictions, sentences for prostitution often results in prison terms of 1 year or

longer. When examining other nonviolent offenses, males often receive sentences that do not involve jail time, while women are sentenced to incarceration (Butler, 2015). These discrepancies manifest in terms of biased and discriminatory treatment (Siegel & Blank, 2010).

Carpenter (2012) said African American were primarily presented as aggressive, hostile, and angry, which results in culturally accepted negative stereotypes in terms of the ways in which African American women are viewed and perceived. However, Turney and Wildeman (2013) said that the presence of women of any race, including African American women within the home, lessens tensions, hostilities, and frictions within the family unit, and offers a multitude of positive benefits for the family unit. Turney and Wildeman said that women maintain extremely influential roles for their children by maintaining balanced perspectives, while their social awareness is developed through childhood and adolescence.

Maternal nurturing supports the entire family unit in various ways. In many instances, women report that they assist with household maintenance and daily functionality through cleaning, cooking, and child rearing (Pettus-Davis et al., 2015). When a woman is not within the family unit, these qualities might be absent from that household and family, which creates an imbalance within the family dynamic, which often has negative consequences, especially for children of the absentee mother (Pettus-Davis et al., 2015).

This study will contribute to positive social change by providing insight and information regarding lived experiences of African American mothers within the criminal

justice system. Additionally, societal awareness of implications respective to multiple incarcerations of African American mothers and their ideas about their maternal roles are rarely explored. This research could potentially assist social change agents and policy makers with moving towards the application of protocols and programming that focuses on avoidance of the long-term damage that is a result of children being separated from their mothers due to incarceration.

Background

Over the past three decades, within the US, the number of incarcerated women has drastically increase by over 700%. The experience of incarceration is experienced three times more for African American women than it is for Caucasian women, and 98% of the prison population in the United States is comprised of women that are of African descent (BJS, 2020). Approximately 68% of women that are in prison have charges that are nonviolent (Carson, 2016). This implies that high incarceration rates of African American women may be a direct result of social and historical rejection from society.

According to Glaze and Kaeble (2014), as of 2011, of the approximately 7 million individuals under adult correctional supervision, approximately 1,200,000 were women, representing the fastest growing incarcerated population by an annual increase of approximately 5%. The increase in the numbers of incarceration of African American women has substantially affected the family unit. Carson (2016) said 70% of incarcerated African American women are mothers of children who are under the age of 18, and many will attempt to reestablish relationships with their children, spouse's partners, and family members. Loper et al. (2014) said forced separation through incarceration results in the

loss of maternal identity and significant guilt and shame, which can be challenging for mothers to overcome. Additionally, the separation between a mother who is incarcerated and her offspring due to incarceration usually results in emotional difficulties for everyone within that child's life, which can cause emotional distress for incarcerated mothers (Jarrett et al., 2012). Formerly incarcerated mothers are often subjected to the opinions of their children and other family members regarding their competence and worthiness relating to reestablishing their maternal roles and status.

According to Aaron and Dallaire (2012), children of incarcerated parents are three times more likely to experiencing school failure, antisocial behaviors, criminality participation, psychological issues, and behavioral problems. Miller and Barnes (2015) said the damage children encounter as a consequence of paternal imprisonment affects them throughout the duration of their lives, not just in childhood. However, it has been suggested that the children of maternal incarceration may be affected differently than children of paternal incarceration. According to Wildeman et al. (2012), children who have incarcerated mothers presented with heightened intensity respective to disruptive behaviors both at home and school and challenges with properly developing social attachments and bonds. These negative consequences are more prevalent and intense, if separation occurs during childhood years, in addition to emotional instability, failing in school, and increased severity of psychological disorders compared to children of incarcerated fathers. Subsequent to multiple incarcerations, previously incarcerated mothers also have difficulty successfully reestablishing their parental roles with their children (Opsal & Foley, 2013). Loper et al. (2014) said parental reestablishment issues

negatively affect African American women and their emotional and mental well-being, particularly regarding their children and caregivers.

Poor and minority individuals are substantially impacted by incarceration, including disadvantaged populations such as underprivileged African American women. African American women who are incarcerated often have multiple challenges to deal with, including abuse, lack of education and job skills, mental health instability, and poverty (Gross, 2015). Ayre (2012) said incarcerated mothers often receive surrogate parenting for their children; however, many times the surrogacy is provided by older adults within the mothers' family unit and are often in need of assistance in terms of healthcare and finances. Brown and Bloom (2009) said formerly incarcerated mothers who are attempting to regain their maternal roles may be influenced by the opinion of their children's caregiver regarding their worthiness as parents. Experiences involving multiple incarcerations often increases the chances of recidivism and societal and familial reintegration challenges, for African American incarcerated females (Aaron & Dallaire, 2012).

African American mothers who have experienced multiple incarcerations have had to serve prison sentences on more than one occasion, which results in multiple separations that impact the quality of relationships with their children (Foster & Hagan, 2014). Attempts to parent while incarcerated can create a multitude of negative mental health consequences for incarcerated mothers. For example, maintaining consistent communication and visits from children can be limited by physical and financial barriers

for many incarcerated mothers and caregivers of their children, which can be psychologically and emotionally damaging to them.

Children's rights laws articulate that every child has the right to maintain parental bonds with their parents (Manning, 2012). Although these laws endorse the importance of supporting the maintenance of healthy relationships between incarcerated mothers and their children, there is limited documentation regarding perceptions of African American mothers who have experienced multiple incarcerations and their maternal roles.

Research involving lived experiences of African American mothers who have experienced multiple incarcerations remains underexamined. Additionally, it is not known how African American women contend with being mothers while in prison and how they formulate their identities as mothers while incarcerated. The present study involved exploring the lived experiences of African American mothers who have experienced multiple incarcerations in order to examine how their incarcerations impacted their ability to parent from prison and reestablish maternal roles with their children. Additionally, the theoretical framework allows for exploration of experiences involving modifying maternal roles in prison and will lead to positive social change by influencing the creation of services and policies that aim to service families who are directly impacted by maternal incarceration.

Framework

Theoretical Framework

Butler (2015) said that within mainstream society, there are both gender imbalances and aspirations to cultivate social change to improve gender equality.

Women's activists and feminists have addressed conditions prompting oppression of women. Many fundamental activists and feminist criminologists particularly desired to address the mistreatment of women in the judicial system. They likewise developed methods for supporting oppressed women groups.

With the expansion of the female population within the criminal justice system, there is a need to discover strategies that acknowledge gender. Feminist theory (FT) and more specifically Black Feminist Theory, involves methods that supports understanding the treatment of minority women in society, choices which unfavorably influence them, and cultures that treat African American women unfairly.

Women are disregarded within traditional criminology theories, and their representations are mutilated and stereotyped (Hemmings, 2011). FT provides a supportive focal point to assist with the comprehension of the treatment of women with histories of multiple incarcerations from a societal standpoint.

The examination of monetary differences and societal maltreatment of women was a fundamental principle of feminism. The current proposed study involves exploring Black feminism in the context of specific challenges that influence the respective societal viewpoints, self-perceptions, and interplay with others.

Hooks (2000) said race, gender, and capitalism converge by contrasting patriarchy with prejudice and different types of mistreatment. Hooks said sexism, bigotry, and different types of persecution are directed at minority women. Specifically, financially disadvantaged Black women confront an unpredictable nexus of connections in which social composition, sex, and race characterize Black women (Collins, 2012).

Examination of the ways in which women develop a moral consciousness was necessary to accurately determine how societal persecution influences the manner in which these women view themselves respective to their incarcerations. Incarcerations impact the children and families of financially disadvantaged African American women (Alexander, 2012).

Using a critical criminology theory helped in terms of understanding how the criminal judicial system and participants' self-observations related and subsequently influenced their maternal identity and their associations with their children.

Conceptual Framework

The critical criminology and Black feminist theory were the primary conceptual frameworks that support this case study. Critical Criminology primary focus is to reveal untruths, and to confront traditional beliefs about criminal justice and crime. The foundation of Critical criminology assisted the researcher with providing awareness about how (a) multiple incarcerations influence African American women's perceptions of their maternal roles and (b) how these multiple incarcerations influenced their maternal relationships. Additionally, mainstream societal viewpoints and oppression were of substantial importance when examining the participants' efforts to reestablish their maternal roles and reintegrate into family units after incarceration, perceptions and explanations of how incarceration impacted their maternal roles, and development of their self-worth and self-image.

Black feminist theories and critical criminology theories intersected to assist with understanding lives of these African American mothers who have histories of numerous

incarcerations. Critical criminology theory was used as a lens to understand, evaluate, and address their relative social circumstances as well as explore how multiple incarcerations affect the ways in which African American women negotiate their roles as mothers.

Research Question

The following research question within this qualitative case study was developed to explore the lived experiences of African American mothers who have experienced multiple incarcerations.

RQ1: How does incarceration influence African American women's perceptions regarding their ability to maintain their maternal roles?

Nature of the Study

This qualitative case study with a multiple case design was used to address historical influences that impact African American mothers' experiences based on multiple incarcerations and how these occurrences impact their children, ability to maintain their maternal roles, and quality of life. As a result of African Americans being the most rapidly growing female population within the US correctional system (BJS, 2020), they were chosen as the sample for this case study.

Historical examination through more than one lens is permitted through the use of a multiple case design (Liebman et al., 2014). This methodology assisted with understanding multiple incarcerations and their impact on African American mothers' viewpoints of the maintenance of their maternal roles. Participants in this study were African American mothers that reside in Las Vegas, Nevada, who have experienced

incarceration for a minimum of 90 days at least two times a year for time period of at least 5 years.

The case study methodology was chose to allow the participants the opportunity to articulate their perceptions and experiences regarding the impact that their incarcerations had on maternal roles. Through their descriptions of experiences involving incarcerations, beginning from their first incarceration experience to their most recent, I analyzed how these women negotiate their maternal roles and view their interactions and relationships with their children and society after they return home.

To gather data from 12 previously incarcerated African American women regarding their perceptions about themselves, maternal roles, children, and society, semi-structured interviews were employed. Twelve participants were chosen because this sample size can greatly contribute to the ability to analyze conflicting information . Additionally, this research project was used to initiate gathering of information regarding histories of women in terms of trauma and abuse and examine if these histories impacted how participants related to their children subsequent to multiple periods of incarceration. Data derived from interviews in this case study were used to address appropriate methods for managing social issues, like reductions in the number of women who are sentenced to prison for nonviolent crimes, providing improved means for mothers to interact with their children during incarceration, and creating programs that concentrate on assisting mothers with reintegration before they are released.

Operational Definitions and Terms

African American women: Term used to portray women of African descent that identify as American (Graham & Harris, 2013).

Black women: Term used to portray women that are of African descent (Graham & Harris, 2013).

Colorism: Stereotypical and offensive views and beliefs involving skin shading, hair surface, texture of hair, and facial highlights that privilege those that are closer to media conceptions of Whiteness (Monk, 2021).

Cochild rearing: Mutual obligations of child caretakers whether living together or not. Different relatives accept obligations for children when guardians are missing (Strozier et al., 2011).

Delicate family: Families normally comprised of unmarried couples with children who limited financial assets challenges with education and stability (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

Imaginary kinfolk: Informally organized families characterized as people who are not connected by either blood or marriage (Taylor et al., 2013).

Slut: A slang term used to depict women who have no limitations in terms of what they do for money, lack ethical beliefs, and demonstrate oversexualized conduct (Oppliger, 2008).

Support program: Assistance given to once detained mothers through formal programs while in jail.

Research Methods

The qualitative case study method was the ideal choice for this study because this research involves a small sample population size, and to best address lived experiences of participants, it is necessary to explore their perceptions, behaviors, and emotions. A quantitative data analysis approach would not allow for this and was excluded as a feasible option for this research project, because this research maintains a goal of comprehensively investigating participants' experiences.

Although narrative research has many similarities with case study methodologies, there are differences that make narrative inquiry an undesirable choice for this study. According to Creswell (2007), while case study researchers desire to create themes, narrative researchers recognize and place relative stories into appropriate contexts. Finally, this present study is descriptive and exploratory.

Research Methodology Rationale

There are several research traditions that are available within qualitative research. Due to the sample population being small, the case study approach is the most appropriate for this research project. According to Yin (2003), a case study is an empirical inquiry that involves examining a current phenomenon in a real life context, primarily in instances when there is a lack of clearly defined boundaries relative to the context and phenomenon. Within this study, the phenomenon is maternal incarceration, and the context is how maternal incarceration impacts the way previously incarcerated mothers negotiate their maternal identity and relationships.

Case study methodologies are used by researchers to cultivate comprehensive analyses. Merriam (2001) said case study results produce complete and rich reports of examined phenomena and are grounded in real life situations. Additionally, Merriam (2001) said case study results provide insights that highlight relative meanings and broaden experiences of readers. Essentially, a case study is a descriptive summary or narrative that involves discussing certain circumstances that are experienced by either individuals or groups of people. According to Yin (2003), researchers who conducting case studies should not worry about stringent guidelines, formulas, and rules, and maintain an open mind. While conducting case studies, researchers usually address outcomes of collected data that are gathered during the research process because different outcomes might occur when conducting the same study with a different sample of participants. Employing case study methods for this small population will lead to results and findings that may allow future researchers to extend this study, using additional demographics or a larger geographical area or population.

With respect to case studies, there are many types that can be employed when conducting a research project. Some common types of case studies include single or multiple case studies as well as exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive case studies. The multiple case study design using an exploratory method was the chosen methodology. According to Creswell (2007), when the multiple case study design is used, the usual format is to initially provide detailed descriptions of each case and relative themes, followed by an analysis of themes that exist across examined cases, as well as analysis of those meanings. Within this research project, I addressed accurate, succinct,

and clear depictions of experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers in terms of maintenance of their maternal roles. This research expands on knowledge for policy makers and social change agents and serves as a platform to inform program development efforts that support the maintenance of maternal relationships during incarceration.

Possible Types and Sources of Data

The possible sources of information for this case study included the following: The possible sources of information for this case study included the following:

1.) A department of corrections endorsed survey sent to transitional living facilities, support groups, and treatment programs for women, in which potential participants can self-elect and respond.

2.) Interviews with children of African American incarcerated mothers.

3.) Interviews with family members of African American incarcerated mothers.

4.) Review of the State of Nevada Department of Corrections Data Base.

5.) Review of court documents.

Proposed Analytical Strategies

NVivo, which is a computer software program that analyzes qualitative data derived from interviews was employed to assist with the process of data analysis as well as affinity coding. Affinity coding provided supplementary support for data analysis and increased the credibility of results of the data, because I had limited experience with NVivo. Data were managed by systematically organizing and implementing coding themes, which are derived from participants' statements. Information was kept and stored

in files, which permitted exploration of thematic remarks and statements, while

constructing visuals of data.

Visualizations involve graphics such as flowcharts or matrices to analyze results

and arrange items relative to data in sequential order. Extensive categories were used to

organize participant statements as they began to develop and assemble themes and

patterns. In addition, using NVivo with designated identification numbers to document

dates during which each participant interview occurred assisted in keeping participant

statements organized, as well as maintaining anonymity of interviews. Participant

anonymity was secured using the names of flowers as pseudonyms for each participant.

Identifying and securing multiple contact sources was a challenge due to the

transient nature of this target population, coupled with housing difficulties they often

experience, both of which complicated the review processes.

With regard to data acquisition, I determined that open-source documents were a

key factor in understanding this critical population. Court records and custody history,

together with field notes and memos provided substantial historical background

information and insight into the context of these women's lives, which factored into my

understanding of their unique challenges in terms of maintaining maternal relationships

and identity. The Freedom of Information Act made public court records easily accessible

through the Clerk of the Circuit Court in Nevada.

Once saturation was reached, additional responses from participants were

encouraged by shifting to alternative questions. I believed that thematic saturation would

occur when similar responses or statements from all participants were identified. Indirect

and understated details within descriptions given by participants relating to their lives and maternal roles were observed and recorded in order to explore new and different information.

Assumptions

This project commenced with multiple assumptions. As the researcher, I assumed that a multiple case study methodology was the ideal format to review and compare data relevant to my research question. I also assumed that I was equipped and able to secure quality sources to provide detailed and compelling data and best understand personal histories and plights of participants. Finally, I assumed that participants had a genuine interest in participating in the study and were honest when sharing their stories and perspectives throughout interviews. These assumptions were necessary as they assisted with the development of proper instrumentation and greatly influenced the development and the implementation of this study. Despite the limited size of the sample population, the richness of participants' narratives in terms of describing their experiences facilitated my efforts to address the influence that multiple incarcerations had in shaping the participants' perceptions of the challenges they experienced with maintaining their maternal roles, during and after periods of incarceration.

Limitations

Numerous limitations presented themselves during the course of this study. The most notable limitation involved obtainment of participants and acquisition of prior criminal records. The process of securing participants and scheduling appointments took two weeks. Bureaucratic constraints such as administrative processes within the Nevada

Department of Corrections also further delayed receipt of pertinent documents. My choice to restrict the study to African American women demanded mindful consideration of the intricacies of their cultural lifestyles, resulting in limitations in terms of viability in order to extend conclusions of this research beyond the targeted demographic of incarcerated African American women in Las Vegas, Nevada. Also, finding participants who were willing to discuss painful experiences involving their life that influenced their incarcerations limited the number of willing participants in this study. Member checks were used to avoid inaccurate outcomes influenced by researcher bias, which was also a relevant limitation in this study.

Delimitations

This study is restricted to African American women who reside in Las Vegas, Nevada who have been incarcerated on more than one occasion and have at least one minor child. According to Yin (2013), case studies are most effective when there is a clear connection between time, place, and context. Therefore, this study is delimited to African Americans females, who have been incarcerated in order to ensure viable comparison and analysis of data. Additional delimitations are that all of the participants were African American mothers that live in Las Vegas, NV that have experienced incarceration for a minimum of 90 days on at least 2 occasions, over the last five years. This study is also delimited because the qualitative nature of this study, prevented quantifying any relationship between multiple incarcerations and negative consequences with regard to maternal relationships, as qualitative studies involve examining observations and human experiences.

Implications for Positive Social Change

Incarceration of mothers leads to implications beyond simply psychological distress for women who are incarcerated. Families with children are considerably affected and impacted by multiple incarcerations of mothers (Aaron & Dallaire, 2012). Alexander-Floyd (2014) said the American judicial system as well as correctional institutions receive tax monies to support incarceration of women, with seemingly little efforts in support of their rehabilitation. To successfully create social change, it is necessary to make considerations concerning the reintegration of incarcerated African American mothers before their release in order to effectively assist them with reintegrating into their family units and reestablishing maternal roles. Additionally, it is imperative that examination of approaches that assist incarcerated African American mothers in terms of maintenance of their maternal relationships occurs during incarceration. These approaches include providing programs that includes family members and children of incarcerated mothers as an essential aspect of planning respective to reintegration within institutions and correctional facilities. In the future, it could be particularly important for policy makers and social change agents to examine alternatives to incarceration for mothers and support the maintenance of maternal relationships for African American women, during and after incarceration.

This case study contributes to social change by expanding the understanding of negative consequences and influences of multiple incarcerations on African American women, maternal relationships, and family stability, and this study offers insights that will provide assistance regarding effective development of programs that will help

families rebuild and sustain after multiple incarcerations of maternal figures. Conclusions generated from this case study will contribute to positive social change by educating policymakers and social change agents about the lived experiences of this population and offering evidentiary support regarding implementation of programming and supportive measures that can mitigate the negative familial consequences of mothers being separated from their children due to multiple incarcerations. Additionally, there has been a lack of information regarding the magnitude of the influence that multiple incarcerations has on perceptions of African American women regarding their maternal stability. Research conducted within this case study will assist agents of social change as well as policymakers in terms of effectively pursuing efforts that support avoidance of continuing and long-term devastation as well as harm caused due to children being separated from their mothers because of maternal incarceration.

Summary

This study involved using a multiple case study methodology to present research on the effects of incarceration on African American female inmates within the US prison system. According to the BJS (2020), 98% of one million women incarcerated in the US are of African American descent. Many of these women have experienced multiple incarcerations, which weakens family cohesion and exacerbates family disruption with each successive imprisonment (Ayre, 2012). This in turn contributes to a 58% increase in rates of recidivism due to lack of familial support and scarcity of rehabilitative services (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010). As poverty begets poverty, families suffer emotionally and financially when mothers are incarcerated for nonviolent offenses. The disproportionate

incarceration of African American mothers convicted of nonviolent crimes coupled with lack of rehabilitative opportunities leads to increased rates of recidivism as well as increased likelihoods that children will also face incarceration due to systemic destruction of family bonds (Zhao et al., 2020).

Chapter 1 included information regarding the problem, purpose, and research question as well as chosen conceptual frameworks. In addition, I clarified my rationale for selecting a multiple case study approach, along with assumptions, limitations, scope, and delimitations. I conclude the chapter by underscoring the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 focuses on research strategies and the literature review focusing on both the FT and critical criminology theory. Beginning with an overview of African American women and challenges involved with surviving multiple incarcerations, I focused on the importance of family and trust relationships specific to reentry. I proceed to detail aspects of reintegration and incarceration that have a profound effect on the family system. Finally, with regard to gender and moral conscience development, I provide context to understand the participant's perceptions, during the data analysis phase.

In Chapter 3, the study design rationale, and methodology are explained. I also articulate the rationale for choosing a case study design, and address the setting and instruments used to gather information.

Chapter 4 discusses the 12 participants and incorporates their experiences of incarceration and maternal relationships from their viewpoints. The information is examined, translated, and verified to provide and answer to the research question.

Chapter 5 contains information regarding the findings that were derived from this study. I then recognize the constraints of this study, give suggestions for future research, and close the investigation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Given the fact that women are the fastest increasing group of incarcerated populations, with a 700% increase in the last 30 years, coupled with the unparalleled influence that women hold within the African American population, there are substantial social implications surrounding the incarceration of African American women on a national level. While imprisoned, African American women leave behind their children and aging parents, disrupting maternal consistency and family continuity (Zhao et al., 2020). Incarceration of African American women creates barriers and challenges in terms of their maternal relationships, families, and communities (BJS, 2020). Within the correctional system, African American women are among the most understudied segments of the population (Lei et al., 2014). Thus, it is imperative to remedy this critical void in the research. This qualitative multiple case study involves analyzing dynamics and viewpoints of African American women who have experienced multiple incarcerations with an analysis of how their incarceration-related absences affected familial relationships, the role that trauma has had on their psychological wellbeing, and their ability to reintegrate into society.

The following literature review addresses the topic of female African American incarceration, with the goal of establishing a broader context by inspecting established views on the topic as well as personal identity and stigma, maternal identity, and the challenges of coparenting. This literature review examines studies relating to a variety of social problems including mass incarceration, effects of poverty and racism on

relationships, phenomenon of fragile families, impact of trauma, lack of mental healthcare, reality of a justice system that fails to promote rehabilitation, and effects of past paternal incarceration. Finally, this literature review assesses how previous research has studied, defined, and framed the topic of female African American incarceration and how this past research has defined maternal identity over time, thereby revealing disparate definitions.

Literature Search Strategy

Throughout this investigative process, I was committed to examining all accessible existing research on the topic of the incarceration of African American women. I began the literature review process by using Walden University's library. I collected information from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and government databases from the BJS, Office of Juvenile Justice, National Institute of Corrections, and Department of Justice. I searched the following databases to collect additional articles and documents: SocIndex, PsycInfo, PsycArticles, SAGE Premier, ProQuest Central, SAGE Encyclopedia, and Google Scholar. I reviewed case-staffing notes and training materials in order to evaluate various issues encountered by incarcerated individuals. Finally, I analyzed previous interviews with individuals who worked in the field of criminal justice. These diverse sources provided rich and substantial background information and assisted me in locating more current information regarding the topic.

Additionally, the Las Vegas Public Library and University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library were useful sources for hard copies and books, and I also purchased electronic books from Amazon. While I located multiple studies relating to general incarceration,

the incarceration of African American women, and mass incarceration, the majority of relevant studies by seminal authors were published prior to 2011. Although dated and beyond the prescribed 5-year range, data were extracted from seminal sources covering the topics of critical criminology, feminist thought, culture and race, mass incarceration, and the disparate treatment of women of color.

Terms and Theories Used for Research

My search strategy involved the following terms: *female offenders*, *mass incarceration*, *African American women*, *incarcerated women*, *imprisoned women*, *female offender statical data*, *incarcerated mothers*, *incarcerated women in prison*, and *impoverished women*. From there, I began searching for credible information regarding challenges faced by African American families as well as reentry barriers and maternal challenges that women experience following incarceration. I searched journal articles, read numerous books, and discussed this topic with trusted peers before expanding my search to include gender biases, the oppression of women, and the feminist movement, which ultimately inspired me to revisit theories of feminism and specifically investigate Black feminism and critical criminology.

In this chapter, I analyze literature regarding the oppression of women, maternal identity, maternal adjustments, issues relative to mental health, and psychosocial adjustments. I also include literature addressing how repeat incarcerations impact African American women's familial and maternal relationships , maternal identity, and challenges they face during the process of reintegration into their families.

Theoretical Frameworks

FT

Feminist theorists delineate gender inequalities that continue to prevail in modern society with the desire to promote necessary social changes required to eliminate gender inequality. For over 50 years, feminists have labored to enact paradigm shifts required to alter circumstances which allow for the oppression of women.

Given the 700% increase in the number of women subjected to the American judicial system over the past three decades and corresponding impacts on maternal relationships, the family unit, and society at large, identifying gender-sensitive treatment methods and programs in order to achieve improved outcomes is imperative. The FT provides a means of understanding how societal treatment of women of color coincides with decisions that adversely affect them. Within traditional criminology, women of color are disregarded and neglected, and representations and images are misrepresented, falsified, and stereotyped (Hemmings, 2011). Through the linking of gender and race to cultural and collective identities of women, the FT establishes a vehicle to comprehend society's treatment of women who have experienced multiple incarcerations.

An understanding of Black feminist theory is mandatory in the context of this conversation, as the unique oppression that African American women have endured over decades and centuries affects their world view, their interactions with others, and, most importantly, their self-perceptions (Alexander-Floyd, 2010). The Black feminist author Hooks (2000) addressed the intersection of race, capitalism, and gender by comparing patriarchy to racism and other types of oppression. The author advocated for an end to

sexism, racism, and all forms of oppression aimed at women of color. Collins further noted that the habitual denigration of African American women was instrumental in spurring the black feminist movement. Particularly, the economic deprivation that Black women have traditionally faced within their complex nexus of relationships is a defining element in the social constructs of race and gender that traditionally define Black women (Collins, 2012).

Societal oppression has long influenced how women view themselves within the context of their incarceration. Elliott, et al. (2014), examined the African American women's' perceptions concerning how they felt their multiple incarcerations affected their families and noted the importance of also investigating how this impacted these women's moral consciousness (Elliott & Reid, 2019). Combined with Black feminism, the seminal work of feminist author Gilligan (1982) provided a framework to understand the struggle faced by women who endured multiple incarcerations with regards to how they viewed their family relationships after release. Ultimately, the mass incarceration of women, coupled with the multiple incarcerations experienced by many women, has influenced the downward spiral that afflicts many African American women. This is largely due to a system that is unprepared – and often unwilling – to assist poor women of color (Alexander, 2012).

Both critical criminology and Black feminism provide valuable insight on how society views the conduct towards African American women (Nicolaidis et al., 2010). The foundation of critical criminology lies in understanding social structures and providing an interpretation of motives and agencies dealing with crime (Alexander-

Floyd, 2014). The basis of oppression, marginalization, and societal conflict were race, class, and gender orientations, and they advocated the recognition of these factors when determining the treatment of criminals (Heimer et al., 2012; Richie, 2012).

The patterns noted in the above research are consistent with the experiences of African American women and help illuminate the influence that societal factors have on the personal perceptions held by African American women that have experienced incarceration (Kruttschnitt, 2013). Thus, the use of Critical Criminology Theories provides an understanding of this sample's self-perception of how incarceration affected both their maternal identity and maternal relationships.

Maternal Identity

For data analysis in this study, it is essential to have points of reference based on academic literature related to the formation of maternal identity, along with an understanding of how this past literature has been evaluated. This base of knowledge provides a critical lens for examining how formerly incarcerated mothers re-form their own maternal identities post release.

In 1967, Rubin examined the maternal experience of women utilizing the traditional viewpoint of that time period. Rubin noted that feedback from family and other significant individuals in the mother's life had the greatest influence on her maternal identity, and that this influence "is actually woven in the themes of maternal tasks" (Rubin, 1967, p. 54). In the context of his analysis, Rubin's perception of family follows the structure of the traditional nuclear family.

Mercer (2004) expanded on his mentor's seminal work from 1967. Rubin had articulated that the attainment of ones maternal role as a process that results in a woman's achievement of establishing a maternal identity, and is constructed through rigorous psychosocial work that occurs during pregnancy and postpartum, and consequently integrated into her self-image and self-esteem. However, Mercer suggested that maternal identity could be perceived as a complimentary layer above self-identity.

According to Rubin (1967), successful motherhood is determined by the ways in which the acts of mothering are carried out. Three interrelated systems inform maternal tasks: the self-system, the maternal-child subsystems, and the larger family system. Rubin's later work (1984) largely addressed the significance of pregnancy and early infancy, and he identified the following maternal tasks and behaviors that are essential to the mothering experience: nurturing, caring, teaching, guiding, protecting, and providing love in a way that promotes the child's comprehensive development. Scholars agree that a mother's capacity to execute these essential maternal tasks can be impacted by a multitude of influences including culture, mental health/well-being, socioeconomic status, maternal age, support systems, education, and mother-child separations (Flagler, 1990; Rubin, 1984).

Mercer expanded on Rubin's work by contributing to the dialog regarding the influential nature of maternal identity throughout one's lifespan (2004). Mercer redefined maternal identity as a transition to motherhood versus mere role attainment, following a review and fusion of previous and contemporary research relative to transitions to

motherhood (2004). She noted that a woman's maternal identity expands when she

regains confidence in herself by taking on new challenges.

Mercer asserts that the process of motherhood is best studied by examining the

transitions within an individual's lifespan (2004). She notes that these transitions are

influenced by stressors and supports and that they are bound in time. This body of

literature defines maternal identity within a dynamic context and is relevant to this

proposed study for two concrete reasons: 1) formerly incarcerated women experience

significant life stressors when they seek relational support and when they attempt to

reclaim their parenting role, and 2) formerly incarcerated mothers readjust their personal

and maternal identities as they back to their community from prison. Miller (2005) makes

a clear distinction between mothering and motherhood. Miller explains that mothering

exemplifies that individual and personal experiences that women have respective to

meeting the needs of and being accountable their children, while motherhood exemplifies

the context in which mothering is experienced Miller elaborates that in the Western

world, motherhood – as an institution – is shaped by historical, social, cultural, political,

and moral influences.

Beliefs concerning mothering shift and evolve over time based on context, social,

cultural, political, and moral influences. According to Miller (2005), good mothering is

central to the belief that mothers' intensive desire to spend time nurturing their children

coincides – or conflicts – with their obligation to financially provide for their children .

The concept of the good mother that contributes to their household by assuming the role

of a stay at home mother or who experiences ambivalence and guilt for being a working

mother has been afforded primarily to privileged, white women. The powerful ideologies relating to mothering are pervasive, dynamic, and linked to power, and thus they often strengthen idealized notions of motherhood by overriding individual experiences, and thereby, they are not in support of diverseness of motherhood experiences that exist in reality. Thus, it is critical to recognize this difference and avoid reducing women's mothering experiences to reflect the dominant reference group of White, middle class, married women (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991).

Another factor to consider with regard to mothering ideologies is the perception of worthy versus unworthy mothers. Society views poor, but compliant, mothers as worthy and denigrates nonconformist mothers by assigning them with labels of neglect— particularly if they are deemed too sassy, hostile, ungrateful, disassembling, or despairing (Golden, 2005). Additionally, the application of sexism, racism, and classism creates a wider gulf between poor Black mothers and mainstream culture. Yet, despite social exclusion and oftentimes abuse, many poor Black mothers, desire the often elusive respectability of middle-class status for their families (Golden, 2005).

To obtain enhanced understanding relative to the experiences of women who were attempting to reconnect with their motherhood, Brown and Bloom (2009) conducted a mixed-method study by examining 203 parole case files of formerly incarcerated indigenous Hawaiian women who were mostly impoverished and by conducting and utilizing 25 in-depth interviews. They determined that longstanding issues such as housing instability, lack of education and employment, poverty, and minimal access to social services, ultimately often begin engaging in criminality and substance abuse, and

often during childbearing years which results in a challenging maternal legacy to address

after instances of incarceration (Brown & Bloom, 2009). The content from these

powerful narratives provided the essential details, which allowed Brown and Bloom to

identify how the introspective characteristics women's societal reintegration interplayed

with their maternal experiences. Their research illuminated the changes in maternal

identity and caregiver relationships, with Brown and Bloom reporting that their

interviews revealed that difficulties with their children, and their child(ren)'s caregivers

were prevalent, even though the emotional bonds and affections remained strong.

According to Brown and Bloom (2009), social marginalization experienced prior to

incarceration, coupled with post-incarceration challenges, caused many women to

experience what could be deemed as a troubled motherhood, which often included

strained relationships, addiction, domestic violence, and contact with the child welfare

system.

Richie (1996) utilized grounded theory as her basis to conduct research on

identity development in an effort to explain why some African American women

participate in criminality. In her study examining the experiences of both battered and

non-battered African American women, Richie identified three distinct groups. The first

group recounted having privileged experiences, which included ample attention,

resources, and emotional support from their families. The second group reported

experiencing what they described as an average existence, wherein they perceived their

importance in the family to be equal to that of other family members; however, they did

not feel like they had received adequate familial support. The last group described a

troubling situation where they were expected to take on major household responsibilities

in families with low socioeconomic status and few resources who showed little interest in

them. Richie noted that the identities of battered women in her study were tied to pleasing

others, a situation which left them in a more vulnerable position than non-battered peers.

Thus, Richie concluded that battered African American women's sense of ethnic identity

and family loyalty negatively affected their identities, and this sense of ethnic and

familial solidarity adversely impacted the women's self-determination and independence,

making the women more susceptible to gender entrapment, which in turn resulted in a

vicious circle of victimization noted by pressure to commit illegal activities and domestic

violence perpetrated by their intimate partners.

In a qualitative study that examines the histories of participating women, Moe and

Ferraro (2006) identified a link between motherhood and criminality. Women have

specific needs based on distinct gendered experiences. The pair noted that many women

have experienced violent victimization, drug addiction, and involvement in prostitution.

Moe and Ferraro determined that women view motherhood from two specific vantage

points: 1) motherhood as a valued social status in the context of mainstream culture and

expectations, and 2) motherhood as an expected obligation to provide for their children

despite conditions of poverty, drug abuse, and physical and sexual abuse. From these two

vantage points, it is possible to gain insight into how many women have come to

internalize their identity as mothers in a prosocial and pragmatic context.

The Prosocial Identity of Motherhood

Many women who have faced incarceration perceive themselves as good mothers in an effort of self-preservation and to fulfill a desire for social inclusion at the most basic level. In doing so, they had the ability to see themselves as a valuable member of their communities, as opposed to a criminal (Moe & Ferraro, 2006). In the sample they studied, Moe and Ferraro determined that despite their criminal status, most formerly incarcerated mothers maintained a positive view of themselves. According to the researchers, the participants' viewing themselves as competent and commendable mothers, worthy of the love and appreciation of their children, served as a barrier to negative connotations relative to their criminal activities, and served as a source of strength and resilience that the woman may not have been able to derive from anywhere else (Moe & Ferraro, 2006). For these women, their opinions of them being a commendable mother allowed them to assume a more prosocial identity. However, some women who struggled to reconcile their past were unable to achieve a positive image regarding motherhood. The profound remorse that many participants felt about their criminal past led to internalized social stigma, which they were unable to overcome.

Religious convictions provide both support and resilience for many African American women who have experienced incarceration. Ferraro and Moe (2003) determined that adherence to Christian beliefs and church attendance became powerful coping strategies for incarcerated African American women. The researchers explained that before incarceration, several of the women maintained religious affiliations, and because of this and the religious guided supports within the correctional facility, they

often relied on their faith as a source of comfort, pride, and empowerment (Ferraro &

Moe, 2003). In most cases, their religious convictions also helped African American

women preserve the positive parenting perceptions of their identity post-incarceration. In

contrast, Ross (1998) deemed religious convictions as counterproductive with regard to

women recognizing the oppression to which they had been subjected. According to Ross

(1998) while religion may provide comfort, it also reinforces social control. As women

look inward or to God to reconcile their circumstances, they fail to acknowledge the

structural conditions such as violent histories, racial oppression, and poverty that initially

precipitated their criminal actions (Ross, 1998).

African American Motherhood and Relative Historical Contexts

The institution of slavery is responsible for depicting Black motherhood in a

negative manner. According to Roberts (1995), the stereotype of Black women as

sexually promiscuous influenced the perpetuation of their feelings of incompetence and

devaluation mothers. Collins (1994) said that in an effort to justify slave owners' sexual

exploitation, Black women were depicted as Jezebels. Roberts (1995) said a popular

mythology that has existed for centuries, has consistently devalued and debased the black

woman and presented them as not being worthy of motherhood, and he notes that modern

portrayals of Black women as lazy welfare mothers who are eager to exploit the tax-

paying public by having a brood of fatherless children perpetuate this damaging

stereotype. The legacy of slavery on contemporary Black family formation is widely

debated by scholars (Cross, 2003; Wilson, 1987), with some arguing that this legacy is

connected to specific social structures that potentially influence both the family and its

utilities (Levernier & White, 1998; Vandiver, Giacopassi, & Lofquist, 2006). However, while it is critical to refrain from diminishing the African American family experience to the point of essentialist prescriptions, one would be remiss to not acknowledge the historic influence that slavery has imprinted on the African American family, particularly the role that family disruption has played on caregiving practices.

Since the time of slavery – and continuing on in many communities – the characteristics of shared mothering has been widely practiced in communities of African Americans (Glenn, 1994). While this practice deviates from dominant cultural norms, it is not monolithic in nature. As noted by Glenn, specific social and cultural contexts combined with variations in material conditions have contributed to varying approaches to mothering. Many factors are connected to extended-family and community parenting in African American communities, including African values of the family, the concept of the collective versus the individual, and the historical social conditions that have required adaptive and flexible mothering roles (Billingsley, 1992; Collins, 1994; Glenn, 1994). Thus, Glenn concluded that mothering is socially constructed, rather than biologically determined, based on the cultural and historical circumstances noted above (1994).

African traditions have had a marked influence on the practice of shared mothering and caregiving practices among African American women. According to Prater (2011), the historical influences of slavery on the African American family can be understood in the context of cultural relativity and by examining structural/organizational theories. In terms of cultural relativity, researchers emphasize the unique influence of culture, and they perceive the "African American family as embodying its own cultural

integrity traceable to its African ancestry" (p. 205). Prater emphasized the characteristic

influence of the extended family network within African families, and he stated "the

African American family, especially during slavery and later, survived because it

maintained the residuals of the African family support system" (Prater, 2011, p. 209).

Conversely, structural or organizational theorists assert that environment is the

determining factor when it comes to family organization. According to Azevedo,

adaptation to their physical milieu is the key influence on family structure, and it is a

factor that is susceptible to change as individuals and families adjust and adapt to

alterations in their station in life (2011). The reality of splintered families during the time

of slavery made extended family networks a requirement for survival. In light of these

historical circumstances, family organizational practices prevalent in Africa "had a

relative permanence or persistence over time, so that they represent aspects of kinship

that are legitimately termed a part of the African heritage" (Sudarkasa, 1996, p. 90).

Following the demise of slavery, the need for strong kinship networks persisted as

African American mothers continued to rely on their extended family for survival. As

noted by Collins (1997), the burden of supporting all aspects of family life rests with

African American women. Collins explained how the Black motherhood experience is

constantly being renegotiated among other Black women, with Black children, and with

self, asserting that this situation is unique to African American families (1997).

According to Collins, these persistent renegotiations indicate that an individualistic view

of motherhood has been replaced by a group focus. Collins notes that African American

women generally play the dominant role in families with inadequate resources: "The

ideal nuclear family, where the mother has total child-rearing responsibilities, does not

lend itself to the African American mother whose racial oppression has denied her family

sufficient resources to support their needs" (p. 73). During times of incarceration, many

African American mothers have to heavily rely on their kin networks to provide care for

their children. Thus, it is critical to examine the relational adjustments that occur when

formerly incarcerated mothers reclaim their parenting role from familial caregivers.

For example, when Enos (2001) investigated the preferences of incarcerated

mothers relating to caregiving arrangements for their children, she determined that

women took into consideration relational circumstances such as the attributes and quality

of their previous relationship that existed between the incarcerated mother and the

potential kin caregiver along with practical concerns like financial resources when

making her decision. These same relational dimensions are relevant post-incarceration,

when the selected caregiver and the formerly incarcerated mother renegotiate the

parenting role.

Collins (2000) identified an additional significant theme related to African

American parenting: the concept of *other mothering*. Viewed as a creative response to the

parenting demands placed on women experiencing racial and gender oppression, other

mothers fill the parenting void left when blood mothers are prevented from fulfilling their

role. This system of surrogate parenting survived the transition from slavery to modern

times (p. 181).

The issue of post-incarceration maternal identity for African American women is

best perceived as a multidimensional activity. Following their release, blood mothers

must negotiate their parental position with kin and any other mothers who have stepped in, to parent in their absence. In addition, formerly incarcerated mothers must negotiate with themselves in an effort to reform their existing identity from that of ex-convict to fully functioning mother. Given the formerly incarcerated women's stigmatized identity and their many financial, legal, and relational challenges, this is a difficult situation for most women. Their ability to negotiate these competing tensions are largely influenced by the quality of their social support system when formerly incarcerated women attempt to reclaim their parenting role.

The influence of Relational Support on Maternal Identity

Within the lives of incarcerated women, relational support is critical. Substantial examination has been conducted relative to this topic. Proulx, Helms, Milardo, and Payne (2009) defined relational support as the receipt of affirmation, the availability for discussion, and the providing of material assistance in parenting and for basic needs. Cobbina (2010), affirmed that familial bonds support women not only during incarceration, but after release from prison as well. Ultimately, formerly incarcerated women are dependent on families to provide informal support, in addition to financial assistance, housing support, and childcare accommodation (Arditti & Few, 2008; Cobbina, 2010; Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008). These studies highlight the importance of relational support as a positive influence in helping formerly incarcerated women reconnect with their family and the community. On a similar note, successful reintegration into society is linked to the development of positive social networks which help decrease recidivism (O'Brien, 2001).

The Pragmatic Obligation of Motherhood

As identified by Moe and Ferraro (2006), women perceive motherhood as a pragmatic obligation to provide for the needs of their children, even when they face obstacles such as poverty, abuse, and drug use. Moe and Ferraro further asserted that (2006), ". . . the women's motivations for engaging in criminality, were often connected their feelings of responsibility and obligation to provide for their children. Their research exposed the profound guilt that incarcerated women experience. For many of these women, due to their absence from their children's lives, they believe that they have failed in their obligation to provide for their children, and this in turn leads to disappointment in the context of their maternal identity.

Maintaining some form of contact helps many women that are incarcerated women deal with the guilt experienced by not physically being with their children and also assists them in remaining connected to their motherhood status. According to Moe and Ferraro (2006) maintaining a connection to their children permitted them ponder on the future … and provided them with motivation for change, and defiance to accept the social stigmas that are associated with them. However, this is not an easy task, as indicated by Moe and Ferraro (2006) there is little acknowledgement concerning the powerful role that motherhood plays for women in detention centers. Their identity as a parent and a commitment to that role is among the greatest factors in determining post-release survival for many incarcerated women.

African American Women and Multiple Incarcerations

Critical aspects of this research center on the intersections between African American women, their families, and their lack of empowerment. To examine these relationships, I needed to understand how women who faced multiple incarcerations interacted with their families during and after incarceration and how they perceived their reentry into society. Several themes emerged. The majority of African American women who had been incarcerated experienced social disenfranchisement and were generally denied full participation in society (Forman, 2012). The social marginalization these women faced resulted in economic deprivation, which led to lives of chronic poverty (BJS, 2020; Gelb, King, & Rose, 2012; National Women's Law Center, 2012). Within this context of disadvantage, women who had been incarcerated experienced significant barriers to stabilization (Lei et al., 2014).

Within the United States, women of African American descent comprise the greatest part of women in the prison system (BJS, 2020). The absence of mothers, daughters, and sisters from the extended family structure creates broken families. More than any other group of women, nonviolent African American offenders maintain a six times increased probability of receiving sanctions, and they are subjected to harsher and longer sentences (BJS, 2020). This condition of prolonged and severe sentencing creates fragile and strained relationships within family units (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

Women's inability to reconnect with their community following incarceration results in broken family ties, limited resources, poverty, and continued exposure to social injustices (Foster & Hagan, 2014; National Women's Law Center, 2012; Tangeman &

Hall, 2011). Utilizing quantitative research, Jarrett et al. (2012) provided insight as to how the adverse conditions of incarceration affected newly released women and their family units. The examination of case studies that focused on historical and current states of societal reentry indicated a commonality of experience among previously incarcerated women (Gilham, 2012). A review of women's personal interpretations of their lives in the context of their personal and legal challenges, conducted by Cunningham-Stringer & Barnes, indicated that women who experience similar challenges generally share the same struggles (2012). Unfortunately, research utilizing qualitative methods and offering in-depth perspectives were not available for this comparison.

The impacts of maternal incarceration of the respective children is damning. In their study, Foster and Hagan (2014) examined how maternal incarceration affected mother-child relationships from the perspective of the child's well-being, noting the negative outcomes for children who experienced this disruption. While their results furthered the understanding of how children are impacted by this type of maternal separation, it did not identify the effect it had on mothers.

Multiple and lengthy incarcerations have a major influence on the success that returning mothers experience when attempting to integrate back into their former maternal roles (Barrick, 2014). Researchers (e.g., Boudin, 2011; Craigie, 2011; Wildeman, Wakefield, & Turney, 2013) have documented the challenges faced by post-incarcerated African American women when they attempt to parent without considering the ramifications of their absence. Rather than bringing improvement to their children's situation, in many cases negative academic and behavioral related issues emerge in the

school setting when mothers return back to their homes following multiple incarcerations (Craigie, 2011; Esbensen et al., 2012; Taylor & Freng, 2009).

After incarceration, many factors influence women's ability to successfully return to the family unit (Graham & Harris, 2013). Women who experience multiple incarcerations are often parentally challenged by the individual who cared for their children during the incarceration. The distance between correctional institutions and the residence of the children greatly impacts the continuity of the parent-child relationship. When women are confined in facilities that are not easily accessible for children and caregivers to visit, the relationship suffers (Cunningham-Stringer & Barnes, 2012). Ultimately, damaged and lost relationships are the result of prolonged separation (Martin & Wells, 2015).

Stigma and Social and Personal Identity

Numerous scholars have proposed theoretical perspectives of social identity. Older, conceptually based literature provided a basis for thought on identity, devalued identity, stigma, and multiple identities (Goffman, 1963; Erikson, 1968; Golden, 2005).

Erikson (1968) developed a psychosocial perspective of identity development, which generated interest in further research. In his eight-stage model of (identity) development, Erikson suggested that each individual's experience of the *self* is combined with their past, current, and future self-perceptions, along with what they believe others expect (Laney, Carruthers, Hall, & Anderson, 2013). Erikson (1968) attested that the development of identity begins in adolescence, asserting that identity development is a natural component within the lifecycle and serves as a monolithic experience in the

course of human development. The study of how identity develops has expanded to include feminist theories, thereby highlighting the gender differential, and influencing feminists to view women's development as largely relational (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991). According to Erikson (1968), each stage of identity development creates tension between two opposing extremes, and advancement to the next stage of identity development requires the successful negotiation of these extremes. Individuals who experience problematic interactions during this period of development, such as incarceration, often suffer stigmatization to their identity.

Golden (2005) explored the negative stigma experienced by formerly incarcerated African American mothers. Golden notes that economically disadvantaged families are impacted more by the stigmas that are associated with incarceration, since they tend to live in urban areas suffering from the effects of deindustrialization where opportunities for economic security are scarce. Golden argued that for a significant number of these poor African American women, the violent stigmas of their past "predestine their incarceration" (2005, p. 3). Golden further asserted that while low income mothers who are compliant with the dominant system are labeled as the worthy poor, women who behave in a manner deemed as too sassy or hostile, or are perceived as ungrateful, are labeled as the unworthy poor, which grants society permission to ignore their plight. Golden concludes that the gendered racial oppression faced by African American women further complicates the renegotiation of their multiple identities.

Goffman (1963) explored stigmatization and the management of stigma as it relates to personal identity. Goffman (1963) identified stigma as the less desirable

characteristics that an individual possesses, which in turn create a stigmatization influenced by relational processes. Formed in the social sphere via interactional processes, stigmatization is conveyed through internal reflexive action as it relates to others. Thus, a person's stigma is dependent on the meaning that the individual holds concerning the stigma within the shared social spaces that reflexively impact meaning-making. This in turn heightens the significance of social spaces since social information is expressed by symbols denoting prestige, honor, or desirable class position.

Goffman (1963) described the duel meanings of stigma. The first meaning identifies the 'discredited' individual who may assume that her differences are evident to others, and the second meaning addresses the actual discrediting of an individual who is yet unaware that others are mindful of their differences. Beliefs concerning the discredited and the discreditable are linked to perceptions of self-identity. Furthermore, this study indicates that an individual's identity influences how the person negotiates or manages stigma.

Individual stigma has the effect of devaluing a person's identity. The social identity of individuals who have experienced stigma effectively questions their humanity and further devalues them in their relation to others (Crocker and Quinn, 2008; Goffman, 1963; Jones et al., 1984). In Western culture, where individualism is highly valued, along with the core ideologies of self-reliance and personal responsibility, individuals who suffer the stigma of not being considered normal are vilified and devalued. The concept of personal responsibility suggests that individuals with devalued identities have control over the negative outcomes they experience in the course of their lives. Since the stigma

is their own fault, onlookers believe that individuals with a devalued identity get what they deserve in life (Crocker & Quinn, 2008). Supporters of self-reliance and personal responsibility do not recognize the influence that structural and societal factors have on the poor outcomes experienced by individuals who have been stigmatized. This perspective serves to neutralize the effect of stigma by blaming the individual for circumstances of life that are beyond their control.

Views of stigma have evolved over time. Goffman (1963) described the stigma of imprisonment as a blemish of individual character resulting from a weak will, allowing stigmatized individuals to be viewed as less than human. Goffman further asserted that the variety and severity of discrimination individuals have experienced reduce their life opportunities. Golden (2005) took a different approach, suggesting that stigma pertaining to Black incarcerated mothers has a threefold purpose. First, it redirects society's attention to issues of racial oppression. Second, it demands that those who transgress the law are adequately punished in order to justify regulatory policies and laws. Third, stigma serves to maintain traditional hierarchies of power and privilege. Golden not only acknowledges the underlying factors creating stigma, he broadens Goffman's perception that stigma is an individual character flaw and instead identifies the invidious effect it has on limiting an individual's opportunities in life.

In this context, formerly incarcerated mothers encounter social views and self-views that affect their overall sense of identity reformation, leaving the women with stigmatized perceptions of their experiences. Both the formerly incarcerated mother and her family caregiver are subjected to devalued identities that reflect judgments about the

incarceration. In addition, the family members of an incarcerated mother, often experience feelings of stigma and embarrassment relating to their family member's incarceration.

A separate moral stigma is placed on formerly incarcerated women, and mothers who have faced incarceration are treated with particular disdain for violating societal expectations. According to Golden, rather than being seen as victims of racial and gender oppression, Black women are frequently blamed for the most persistent moral problems in America, such as crime, drugs, and poverty. Society elects to blame the victim, rather than ameliorate the structural factors that promote crime, drug use, poverty, and the abandonment of mothering responsibilities by African American women. This response to oppression perpetuates the cycle of crime, broken families, and weakened communities. For formerly incarcerated African American women to succeed, they must renegotiate their multiple identities—especially those which have been devalued.

Many formerly incarcerated mothers struggle with multiple identities. As Swann and Bosson (2010) note, within the context of their give-and-take interactions, people take on numerous identities. The Stone Center Writings Women's Project examines women's identities from a gender specific perspective, emphasizing the significance of relationships in women's lives. This research illuminates how women's identities are intertwined with their experiences with others, particularly the relational entanglements of their environments.

In the reformation of women's maternal identity, the subcomponent of symbolic interaction within identity theory is constructed, relational, and interactional. Thus,

making from a feminist perspective is distinctive because it originates from relational

spaces. The concept of shared meaning is critical to researchers for a variety of reasons.

When formerly incarcerated mothers attempt to re-form their identities and reconnect

with their families, it occurs in the space of shared meaning with the family caregivers of

their children. For a successful transition, both parties must re-form their identities in

relation to their roles of primary caretakers of the children. Respect for the relational

processes and the co-construction of shared meanings are essential for the reformation of

identity.

Development of Gender and Moral Conscience

The creation of a baseline for determining how African American females

develop a moral conscience is critical for establishing how they perceive their families

and what potentially leads them to criminal activity. According to Elliot et al. (2014), in

egalitarian homes, parents have equal status or the mother is the only parent. Whereas, in

patriarchal homes gender differences influence delinquency rates.

Successful reintegration into society for formerly incarcerated African American

women is contingent on their moral compass and the many challenges they face, such as

difficulty in securing stable housing, trouble obtaining jobs, and acceptance back into the

family post-release (Cobbina, 2010). Failure to overcome these barriers increases the

likelihood of continued criminal activity (Cobbina, 2010). Housing challenges are

paramount for determining whether formerly incarcerated women can adequately meet

the needs of their children, which consequently impacts their relationships with the other

members of their family. Most women with criminal records are forced to live in

substandard residences located in blighted communities, because property owners and

managers have the ability to selectively deny tenants from renting in more affluent

neighborhoods (Patterson & Yoo, 2012; Rosen, 2014). Salina et al. (2011) determined a

corresponding relationship between women's upbringings, beliefs, and coping skills and

how they perceived and responded to the housing challenges they confronted. In addition

to their limited housing options, poor employment opportunities – often due to

inadequate education – negatively affects women's perceptions of their capacity to

survive (Collica, 2010).

To understand the genesis of female delinquency and its corresponding thought

processes, Gilligan (1982) examined critical circumstances leading to incarceration. In

many cases, a series of traumatic events disrupted African American family relationships.

Beginning with early childhood experiences, gender had a significant influence on

women's self-perceptions of their ascribed roles in American culture, and gender later

played a contributing role in their socialization and maturation processes. Gilligan's work

helped establish the importance of gender and supported the further development of

Feminist Theory and critical criminology.

Scholarly studies combined with social perceptions informed researchers in their

psychological understanding of how moral consciousness and racial identity developed in

African American women (Vazquez, 2014). This confirmed the seminal work of

Kennedy (1997) on the process in which society reacts to African American women.

Bush (2012) later determined that images of African American women's sexuality

increased their maltreatment and victimization. In many cases, poor decision-making,

coupled with the aforementioned factors, ultimately led to criminal involvement (Bush, 2012).

Researchers also found a correlation between quality of life and ones body image. Compared to other ethnicities, African American women experienced a more pronounced decrease in quality of life as their dissatisfaction relative to their body increased (Cox et al., 2010). Furthermore, their self-esteem and mental health suffered damage from stereotypical representations that are coupled with discriminatory practices within the American judicial system. Consequently, multiple incarcerations of African American women have increased and become more widespread (Carpenter, 2012).

Under the premise that women develop their moral conscience differently than males, Gilligan (1982) explored the role of psychology, particularly the effect that gender differences have in creating social structure. Later researchers were thus able to appreciate how women developed moral consciousness via their relationships to others (Haley, 2013). Gilligan (1982) attested that women struggle for acceptance and address conflict and dilemmas differently than men, because their reasoning emanates from a different rationale. Hence, relational qualities of authenticity, engagement, and trust allow women to problem-solve and overcome obstacles by connecting with mentors and others available for support (Boddy, Agllias, & Gray, 2012). As described by Cobina (2010), Gilligan (1982) suggested that women who engaged in criminal activity had a different process of decision-making based on how they developed their moral consciousness. Gilligan (1982) also identified emotional stamina as an insufficiently noted and undervalued strength for women.

Potter (2013) contended that methods to construct women's identities are reflective of the environment in which they grew up. While the lives of Black women and their involvement in the American judicial system are complicated by their marginalized intersecting identities, according to researchers, women's ability to endure and survive adverse life circumstances is dependent upon their connection with others (Boddy et al., 2012; Gilligan, 1982: Potter, 2013).

Instead of investigating female criminality under the same theoretical frameworks that are utilized for men, supportive research by feminist criminologists, such as Adler and Simon (1975) embraced a gender-specific approach rather than assuming that women's criminal motives and behaviors are identical to men (Schmallenger, 2011). These modern feminists utilized critical criminology to reevaluate policies based on male supremacy (Bush, 2014; Gilligan, 1982). For example, Within the criminal justice system, and compared to their male counterparts, the vast majority of women have been victims of violence and sexual abuse at much higher rates (BJS, 2020).

Damaging policies have been instituted on the erroneous assumptions that both male and female offenders share the same motives and deserve the same manner of punishment. The formation of programs such as boot camp, which was designed by clinical psychologists on a military model of firm structure and strict discipline, potentially induced additional trauma and re-victimization on women who were subjected to unnecessary yelling and confrontation (Salina, et al., 2011). Potter (2013) characterized the assumption that women engage in criminal activities for the same reasons as men as damaging to women, particularly those who committed non-violent

offenses. Higher rates of incarceration are a direct reflection of the limited resources available in communities of color and the voicelessness and overall invisibility of women in the criminal justice system (Clear, 2007; Potter, 2013). With regards to American society, Gilligan (1982) identified the deep historical roots of gender separation, which mirror uncomfortable facts about gender and male privilege. Gilligan's work further shows how policies that disproportionately separate women from their families exacerbate existing problems within familial unit.

Efforts to demonstrate fairness and equity by treating both male and female offenders the same within the American judicial system have compounded rather than alleviated gender disparities (Graham & Harris, 2013). As a result, women have been over-incarcerated, especially nonviolent offenders. An examination of statistics by gender demonstrates that although women commit fewer violent offenses, they are incarcerated at rates similar to men with histories of violent crime (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2020). Non-violent female offenders' family stability and their perception of themselves are damaged when they are treated like violent criminals (Taylor et al., 2013). Therefore, an understanding of how women interpret gender bias in the context of the American judicial system contributes to a better understanding of how the length of a prison sentence impacts African American women and family cohesiveness.

Women's self-perception, self-esteem, and moral reasoning collectively influence their decision to participate in criminal activities, which consequently affects their family relationships (Bush, 2012). Kennedy (1997) and Gilligan (1982) noted how society misdirects future investigations in order to maintain discrepancies in gender issues

regarding the treatment of women. Likewise, Chesney-Lind (2013) and Simon (2004) expressed feminist opinions concerning how women are unintended victims of mass incarceration. Furthermore, they showed how the foundation for institutional correctional policies was established, despite an absence of women in data sets, even as the female prison population increased.

When nonviolent female offenders receive the same treatment in courtrooms, as male offenders, gender inequality is the unfortunate result (Kruttschnitt, 2013). This unfair treatment negatively affects female perceptions and impacts how women later interact with family members, property owners, and potential employers (Clear, 2007). This perception of maltreatment also influences how African American women react to crisis (Blakely &Hatcher, 2013). Sensitivity to the historical traumas of slavery, segregation, and institutional racism results in these life events being more devastating to African American women (Blakely et al., 2013).

The BJS (2020) and the FBI uniform crime report (2021) indicated that 98% of prisoners in custody for violent offenses are male. This statistic raises several questions about sentencing practices that separate nonviolent women from their families for lengthy prison terms (Gelb et al., 2012). Similar findings in relation to gender and crime have been reported by numerous sources including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2013), National Crime Victim Survey (2012), National Incident-Based Reporting System (2013), Bureau of Prisons (2020), and the Office of Juvenile Justice (2020).

Black feminism evolved from the denigrations that women of African descent have habitually experienced, particularly economic deprivation (Craigie, 2011; Jarrett et

al., 2012). Qualitative studies examining the composition and internal dynamics of African American women's extended kinship networks within inner city neighborhoods determined that families pooled resources, augmented services, and created family sociability as survival strategies. These strategies were particularly relevant when families were exposed to social and institutional challenges.

The children of imprisoned parents suffer greater risks of experiencing higher instances of poverty, familial breakdown, social based exclusion, and discrimination; this is particularly true when the mother is incarcerated (Ayre, 2012). The attitudes, values, and beliefs forged in this type of disrupted family become the foundation for unhealthy social and moral development (Elliot et al., 2019). The existing fragile systems within these families are further weakened from the lack of stability that results when parents – especially mothers – are incarcerated (Liebling & Arnold, 2012).

In an effort to understand how adverse events influence women's perceptions, researchers (e.g., Wildeman & Western, 2010) critically examined African American women, with a focal point on documenting how younger females dealt with their exposure to trauma. Gilligan (1982) presented the women's self-perceptions based on their own conception of themselves and the world around them. An observation of how gender disparities and societal treatment influenced women's outlooks allowed researchers to determine how gender affected moral development. Scholars concluded that African American women not only experience life differently than other women, but their experiences also impact how they cope and adapt, to develop resiliency and secure a sense of well-being (Liebman, et al., 2014).

Trust Within Family and Other Significant Relationships

Through the socialization process and by their familial relationships, an individual's experiences, ideals, social norms, perspectives, and identity, perspectives, and life experiences are shaped and established (Wilder & Cain, 2011; Chavis, 2012). Social engagement allows for the establishment of trusting relationships and also influences childrearing practices. Despite the anticipated variations between cultures, incarceration impacts trust levels and bonds between family members when an incarcerated individual returns home (Foster & Hagan, 2014). The hostile and predatory environment that inmates experience affects their personality and their capability to interact with others upon release (Taylor et al., 2013).

To survive their hostile environment, female prisoners establish relationships based on fictive kin families (Taylor et al., 2013). Anthropologists and ethnographers describe fictive kin as social ties not based on blood ties or marriage (Shwartz-Soicher, Geller, & Garfinkel, 2011). These fictive families help incarcerated women cope with their situation (Cook & Willams, 2015). After repeated incarcerations, fictive kin circles often extend beyond prison walls and reach into the community. Later attempts to insert these fictive kin families into their blood family becomes a challenge when the blood family does not accept these unrelated friends. Among male prisoners, social relationships are often anxiety-based and formed for survival and as a means to avoid punishment or harm. Hence, the variations of trust levels with other prisoners and staff that male prisoners engage in are related to violence, power, and dominance (Liebling & Arnold, 2012). At present, feminist theories offer no explanation as to the role of gender

differences in the variations of trust relationships in order to explain why women focus on building connectedness and how they formed trust relationships.

When blood relatives are not responsive to the needs of previously incarcerated women, that woman is usually forced to rely on their fictive kin networks to find resources, obtain housing, and support their sobriety (Glass, 2014). However, this reliance on fictive kin often creates additional challenges for women seeking to avoid opportunities for criminal activities (Bowles et al., 2012). Without family support and continuity, it proves difficult to maintain a crime-free lifestyle (Cook & Willams, 2015). In addition, women previously involved in criminal lifestyles had trouble trusting non-criminals (Barrick, 2014). Thus, while they were able to develop trust relationships with fictive kin, they experienced a lack of trust within their blood families. Placing more trust in fictive kin relationships than in family members causes familial resentment and creates additional stress on women returning from periods of incarceration (Mchale, Waller, & Pearson, 2012). While providing insight into social networks within the prison setting, Taylor, et al. (2013) did not examine post-incarceration effects. After their return to civilian society, formerly incarcerated women established friendships and new fictive kin relationships through attending support group meetings at recovery homes and twelve-step meetings (i.e., Alcoholic Anonymous, Narcotic Anonymous), with individuals like themselves who struggle to maintain their sobriety (Collica, 2010).

For years, feminists agreed upon the relational nature of women, noting the trusting manner in which women interact (Bloom et al., 2004; Collica, 2010). This process exposed how women engage in interpersonal relationships (Richie, 2012). Martin

et al. identified how trust relationships for African American women extend beyond the

family to include other formal and informal support systems (2010). For instance, African

American women estranged from their families gained support from their church or other

organizations where they gained fictive kin brothers and sisters (Taylor et al., 2013).

Numerous studies validate the significance of religion in African American communities

(Brade, 2008). Church membership provides a support system that blends the community

well-being with social justice and Christian values, providing African American women

with social support in addition to practical and formal education (Goldweber et al., 2014).

For this reason, social welfare programs allowed religious institutions to be accessed as

resources.

Trust networks are critical to many women's stability. However, the shame and

stigma associated with incarceration creates significant difficulty for many women to

establish trusting relationships with others (Chavis, 2012). Fearing negative interactions,

some affected women avoid support networks such as church (Martin et al., 2010).

However, amongst African American women – especially older women – spirituality has

continually been a stabilizing and protective presence and is present in conversations

relating to recovery and the betterment of their lives (Lichtenwalter, Garase, & Barker,

2010). While some affected women avoid casual supportive systems, the performance of

extended kinship networks is critical in developing successful coping strategies based on

studies of low-income African American families (Jarrett et al., 2012). While the

significance of family and trust networks has been established, research has failed to shed

insight on how women overcome the stigma of their past and the ambivalence of returning to their previous support networks (Opsal & Foley, 2013).

Society has traditionally denigrated recipients of welfare and public assistance (Sugie, 2012). Similarly, incarcerated individuals are seen as getting a free ride while imprisoned and are looked down on for receiving entitlement benefits upon release to assist them in supporting their families. Salina et al. (2011) noted that stigma and other issues create barriers that women face when they attempt to access services, which prevent them from seeking help. Mouzon (2013) asserts that compared to other ethnicities with substance abuse and/or mental health issues, formerly incarcerated African American women have significantly smaller social networks (2013). According to Gilham (2012) misperceptions of incarcerated women concerning social welfare programs prevented them from fully accessing resources, which negatively impacted their activities and relationships with their children.

There exists a great distrust of the judicial system within the African American community. This distrust has infiltrated into other areas of African American women's lives, such as a fear of police and the court system (Alexander, 2012). Social service agencies and other organizations which support and assist families, such as the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), are also sources of stress and distrust for African American families (Blakely & Hatcher, 2013). The solution for overcoming family reintegration problems and rebuilding family trust for women who have experienced multiple incarcerations remains elusive (Jarrett et al., 2012).

Forced separation due to incarceration also strains or ends romantic and marital relationships (Shamble et al., 2013). The numerous policy changes at Nevada correctional facilities, which often occur at the discretion of facility officials, make it difficult to determine the frequency of spousal and family visitation (Nevada Legislature Bureau of Prisons, 2003). The Nevada Administrative Title 20 Code Part 525 Rights and Privileges, which regulates visits inside of prison institutions, had not been altered since 2003. This code, which limits visitation hours, requires prior approval for visitations, limits the ages of visitors, and places limits on privacy, further erodes strained family relationships (Wildemanet al., 2013). Questions of fidelity and accusations of unfaithfulness plague relationships during periods of incarceration. Trust between partners is often impacted, which frequently leads to violence when couples are reunited (Bowles et al., 2012). Further research on how incarceration impacts families is clearly needed, particularly whether problems concerning trust are more pronounced when both mothers and fathers are incarcerated (Tomandl, 2015).

Studies show that in the homes where women are the primary caregivers before incarceration there are fewer differences in parental involvement (Turney & Wildeman, 2013). Of particular concern is how female incarceration affects the parenting of male children. Research indicates that the effect on Black families is less severe when fathers are incarcerated because men are generally less involved in caregiving than mothers. Incarceration results in repeated trust issues for the woman and also children, who often have difficulty developing and sustaining relationships as they mature (Craigie, 2011).

Psychological and Social Adjustments

Social adjustment for formerly incarcerated women depends on conforming to macro-level challenges. For example, many African American women with multiple incarcerations face racial stigma, in addition to micro-level issues of individual stability (Liebling & Arnold, 2012). Research confirms that African American women that have been subjected to multiple incarcerations experience numerous psychological and social challenges (Salina et al., 2011). According to Ardetti and Few (2008), multiple incarcerations lead to a situation of interrelated risk factors referred to as the triple threat of depression, domestic violence, and substance abuse (p.303). Other scholars focused on how this triple threat of depression, violence, and addiction, and leads to maternal distress (Salina et al., 2011; Wahab et al., 2014). As noted by Comfort (2012), poverty, illiteracy, and other social ills are the precipitating factors that lead to the afore mentioned triple threat, which results in multiple incarcerations.

Regarding depression, there are significant differences regarding treatment, as African American women have a reduced likelihood to receive or pursue referrals (Nicolaidis et al., 2010). Research indicates that physicians have a reduced likelihood of detecting, treating, or appropriately managing and/or treating symptoms of depression among African Americans. Recent studies in women's own voices examined how their perceptions influenced their interactions and choices. These studies documented the women's perceived strengths and barriers in their family relationships (Barrick, 2014). In many cases, psychological stress within families prompted a return to the negative behaviors which resulted in a return to the criminal justice system.

The women who impaired by mental health disabilities or trauma need to recover from their past wounds to be able to benefit from respective treatments (Salina, et al., 2011; Shantz, Kilty, & Frigon, 2009). The mistreatment of formerly incarcerated African American women had the long-term effect of damaging their children through adulthood (Copeland & Snyder, 2011). The consequences were greater for younger children, since dependency on maternal care decreases as children mature and are better able to provide for themselves (Boudin, 2011). However, older children also experience significant risk factors when their mothers are imprisoned, as their sense of marginalization increases (Geller et al., 2011).

Despite previous incarcerations and any mental health issues, virtually all African American women seek a positive relationship with their children and hope that upon release, they will be able to regain custody of their children (Cunningham-Stringer & Barnes, 2012). Due to the combination of substance abuse, mental health issues, legal problems, and difficult relations with family members, many of these women are challenged to fulfill their care-taking responsibilities (Gilham, 2012). The belief that strong family networks protect African Americans from severe distress is a common argument that has been used to explain the racial contradictions that are present in the mental health community (Mouzon, 2013). However, later research has discredited this view, noting that these protective factors had decreased over time and family support was not as dependable as previously theorized (Pullen, Perry, & Oser, 2014).

A wealth of literature concerning women's incarceration has compared the experiences of African Americans to women in other ethnic groups. Some scholars do not

acknowledge the effect that social influences have on women's choices to commit crimes (Nicolaidis et al., 2010. Other scholars identify psychological stress as one of the many difficulties faced by formerly incarcerated women who after long periods of incarceration attempt to reintegrate into their communities (Aaron and Dallaire, 2010; & Barrick, 2014).

Studies illustrate how the unique experience of African American women relating to their past exposure to bigotry, racism, and stereotypes – combined with any underlying history of maltreatment – influenced their social adjustment (e.g., Belknap, 2010; Salina et al., 2011). In order to achieve social adjustment, newly released female offenders must overcome the stigma of their first incarceration, while attempting to secure employment (Goldweber et al., 2014). Often, there are situations where children refuse to welcome mothers back into the family, which in turn complicates overall familial reintegration by hampering mothers' ability to interact with other members of the household (Salina et al., 2011).

African American women's self-perception and social identity are partially determined by society's assessment of a women's worth (Byrd & Shavers, 2013). When African American women and their families are described using gender, ethnic, and family structure stereotypes, negative self-images are established (Oppliger, 2008; Byrd & Shavers, 2013). By consistently viewing themselves through this defeatist lens, women's overall psychological health is damaged (Byrd & Shavers, 2013).

Gender stereotypes applied to African American women by the mainstream media has influenced their self-perceptions and their ascribed roles within American

culture (Oney et al., 2011). Images depicting Black women as welfare queens in the

1990s and video vixens in the 21st-century further stigmatized the perceptions that the

African American women have relative to their value and place in society (Logue, 2011).

These stereotypical depictions not only had an adverse impact on the perceptions that

Black women maintain regarding themselves, they also reinforced common beliefs held

by dominate society towards African American women, which further complicated the

women's adjustment back into society (Kruttschnitt, 2013). Disparate treatment of

women, coupled with the social challenges of living in poverty under duress,

compromises formerly incarcerated women's ability to develop the effective coping skills

needed to maintain healthy relationships (Salina, et al., 2011). In the end, incarceration

complicated relationships that were fragile and tenuous to begin with.

Research on incarcerated women in Clark County Jails, continues to validate the

correlation between mental health presentation and incarceration (Hatzenbuehler et al.,

2015). The numerous unmet needs of incarcerated African American women negatively

affect their mental health status (Schnittker et al., 2012). Christian and Thomas (YEAR?)

identified how misdiagnosed and undiagnosed African American women become

susceptible to encounters with the judicial system, which has become the new warehouse

for America's discarded citizens since the 1980s (2009). Many elder African American

women have suffered from undiagnosed depression for many years, which disrupts their

ability to productively interact with their family members (Spence et al., 2011).

Byrd and Shavers (YEAR?) determined in their study on self-esteem that self-

reliance was among the most significant things that women gained from their social

support systems. For women with histories of incarceration, it was essential to find resilience from within. Without adequate support during their incarceration, institutionalization exacerbated existing mental health problems, making the return to the family unit difficult (Foster & Hagan, 2014). Formerly incarcerated women without support from their children's father had greater difficulty in sustaining lasting family connections due to their broken family systems (Shamble et al., 2013).

While incarcerated, many women engage in alternative lifestyles, which often leads to psychological heterosexism that is sometimes exhibited through the promotion of violence against lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgendered (LGBT) people (Martinez & Sullivan, 2011). Although African Americans collectively experience societal discrimination and place strong value on the extended family, many members of their community find this alternative lifestyle and gay identity unacceptable. Strongly held anti-gay attitudes within Black culture is commonly attributed to religious beliefs, scarcity of available me, and heterosexist attitudes. Additional family stress is created when family members reject this alternative lifestyle, which can lead to problems when formerly incarcerated women attempt to regain guardianship of their children (McNamara, 2014). Many women are too ashamed to discuss their experiences during incarceration, which creates a veil of silence that pervades their lives (McIntyre, 2013).

Coparenting and Caregiving

Substantial literature documents the stress that the caregivers of children that have an incarcerated mother experience (Dowdell, 1995; Gleeson & Seryak, 2010; Hanlon, Carswell, & Rose, 2007; Jendrek, 1994). Grandparent caregivers are particularly affected

by the myriad problems they experience when assuming the parenting role for

grandchildren. This includes greater social isolation, limitations of daily activities, more

depression than grandparents not caring for grandchildren, poor health, financial

struggles, and lower levels of marital satisfaction. Financial issues that many of these

grandparents face include quitting their jobs or reducing work hours and stretching

already fragile budgets or exhausting their savings (Hanlon, Carswell, & Rose, 2007). For

grandmothers, the stress of raising grandchildren also brought on feelings of social

isolation and alienation, which were often due to their own reluctance to seek help

(Jendrek, 1994).

Incarceration is a primary reason for the growth in family caregiving (Gleeson

2009, 2011; Gleeson & Seryak, 2010; Gleeson, Strozier, & Littlewood, 2011; O'Brien,

2001; Smith, Krisman, Strozier, & Marley, 2004). In most of these circumstances, it is

the biological parent that entreats relatives to care for the children (Gleeson, Strozier, &

Littlewood, 2011). As noted by Gleeson et al. (2011), family caregiving is an issue

preceding and following incarceration. In many cases, mothers ask family members to

become permanent caregivers in an effort to keep their children out of the child welfare

system. After incarceration, mothers often hope to join the household.

Research indicates that at the familial level there are protective factors that

promote coparenting relationships (Gleeson et al., 2009; Jendrek, 1994). Gleeson et al.

(2009) identified the following protective factors that motivated caregivers to look after

children: love for the children, desire to ensure that their children maintain a sense of

belonging and preserve their well-being and safety, commitment to keeping families

together, and an aspiration to preserve the family legacy and believed familial obligation. Regardless of the events that led to incarceration, the motivations for familial caregiving impact the family dynamic following release when the family caregiver is expected to transfer the parenting role to the formerly incarcerated mother.

Research confirms that many caregiving responsibilities are shared even when caregivers and biological parents do not reside in the same home (Gleeson et al., 2011). However, the existence of multigenerational family systems does not equate to shared coparenting responsibilities. Relational processes including parenting, transfer of the parenting role, and other relational activities that influence a person's identity reformation can be impeded or enhanced by myriad circumstances.

The relationship between formerly incarcerated women and their caregiver relative is affected by many processes. Gleeson et al. (2011) identified a multitude of clinical problems that influence custodial kinship coparenting situations and multigenerational families: (a) the condition and characteristics of the relationships that exist between the parent, the kinship caregiver, and the children; (b) histories that exists between the parent and the kinship caregiver respective to caring for the child(ren); c) complexities caregiver arrangements complexities; (d) existing needs of the parent(s); (e) existing needs of the children; and the (f) the burden, depression, and stress that is associated with the kinship caregiver caring for the child(ren).

A seminal study on coparenting relationships examined how teen parents adjust to multigenerational challenges within their coparenting families, how coparenting differs between cultural groups, and how power dynamics are negotiated within coparenting

relationships (Strozier et al., 2011). Strozier et al. (2011) identified three basic

coparenting arrangements: (a) the grandmother maintains primary control within the

relationship; (b) parenting is equally shared between the mother and grandmother; and (c)

the mother has primary control. Researchers determined that mothers are usually more

comfortable with having grandmothers in control when they view grandmothers as the

parenting expert. Occasionally, parental power is effectively shared between the two

generations of women. Having both parties agree that the mother should assume primary

control is the least common situation.

A framework with four dimensions was developed by Van Egeren and Hawkins

(2004), to define the interactional nature of a coparenting relationship: (1) coparenting

solidarity; (2) coparenting support; (3) undermining coparenting; and (4) shared

parenting. As a unified executive subsystem, coparenting solidarity is the ideal. This

situation is noted by warm and positive relations between partners, shared value systems,

the projection to the children of a strong coparenting dyad, and a genuine effort to depict

the mother in a positive light despite her absence from the family. Van Egeren et al.

(2004), defined coparenting support as "strategies, efforts, and actions that support and

prolong the partner's goals and/or their perceptions of support relative to his/her attempts

to achieve parenting goals" (p. 169). In focusing on the parent's position as the recipient

rather than provider of support, the goal is to provide positive reinforcement. Van Egeren

et al. (2004) explained that undermining coparenting occurs when strategies and actions

are used to block a partner's attempt to achieve their parenting goals. This includes overt

actions such as lacking respect for parental decisions and direct criticisms and

judgements, in addition to verbal criticism of the partner in their absence and covert actions such as interrupting the coparenting partner when speaking to the children and ignoring the opinion of the parenting partner. In shared parenting there is a division of caregiving labor, such as caregiving tasks and limit setting. It is assessed based on the balance of each partner's involvement with the child or by mutual involvement, wherein both parental figures are engaged with the child simultaneously (Van Egeren et al., 2004).

The nature of the birth parent-caregiver relationship determines the style of coparenting and also strongly influences subsequent relationships for previously incarcerated women (Gleeson et al., 2011). Gleeson et al. (2011) determined that coparenting was most successful when the mother-grandmother dyad shared similar ideals respective to child rearing, maintained a strong and healthy communication, perceived themselves as a team, were willing to compromise with each other, and were able to have compassion for each other.

The women that had coparenting relationships where unification, harmony, and agreement was lacking, often struggled over the mother criminality engagement and/or substance abuse, discipline, competency and power, and consequent disunion and detachment from the family unit (Gleeson et al., 2011, p. 273).

A critical event in the coparenting relationship is the reclamation of the parenting role, which may be incremental and inclusive of coparenting strategies. Due to its relational nature, the success or failure experienced when attempting to reclaim the parental role can positively or negatively influence how the previously incarcerated woman reforms her identity. The general relationship over time of coparenting partners,

such as power dynamics, the interactional process, coparenting overlap, parenting style disagreements, and undermining behaviors affects the formerly incarcerated woman's maternal identity and her success in reclamation of the parental role. These factors also influence the condition of the post-incarceration relationship birth parent and the caregiver.

The procedure in which formerly incarcerated mothers reclaim their parenting roles is recursive and reflexive. According to Pinker and Jackendoff, "Recursion refers to a procedure that calls itself, or to a constituent that contains a constituent of the same kind" (2005, p. 203). Thus, recursion uses its own output as its next input causing each type of interaction to influence the next, which can be extended infinitely. This makes it useful when evaluating the processes of human interaction with regards to coparenting, in addition to the reformation of maternal identity. "Reflexivity betweenness" is a concept that identifies what transpires in the process of reclaiming their parenting role and reforming maternal identity between formerly incarcerated mothers and their children's family caregiver (Cunliffe, 2003, p. 988). Based on the disciplines of cultural anthropology, sociology, and social constructionism, this concept deals with the constitutive nature of language (Cunliffe, 2003). As noted by Cunliffe (2003), within the interactional space between participants new meanings are created. Hence, determining how others socially construct their realities is a first-order approach to applying reflexivity.

Relationships Between Mother and Child

The lives of children are critically disturbed when their mothers are incarcerated. Before incarceration, mothers are generally more present, involved, and consistent in the lives of their children than fathers. Yet while in prison, mothers receive fewer visits from their children, which negatively affects parental relationships (Martin & Wells, 2015).

Securing a stable and accommodating caregiver is an issue that all incarcerated women face, as the emotional need to preserve a solid relationship with their children during incarceration is profound (Derby, 2012). Mothers are concerned about the extra burden that their children place on caregivers presiding over already impoverished African American households, and they worry about where their children will be when they are released from prison.

Assorted family members generally step up to care for minor children and support adult children when African American women become incarcerated (Dallaire, 2019). Since relational patterns between mothers and custodial grandmothers are the main units of analysis, McHale et al. (2012) studied the critical role that grandmothers assume in the lives of their grandchildren when mothers are in custody. Although researchers were able to shed light into the nature of African American women's mother-daughter relationship in this context, additional research is essential to gain complete understanding relative to how previously incarcerated women manage their relationships (Bell, 2008; McHale et al., 2012). Many caregivers remain intimately involved after the mother returns from prison. This can either be a source of strength for returning mothers or a source of anxiety when mothers are insecure about their ability to effectively parent (Gilham, 2012).

The experience of African American mothers is markedly different than conventional White, middle-class depictions. For example, in African American families, women commonly share parenting with "other mothers" who may not be blood related; whereas in other cultures, the responsibility of motherhood is not shared. It has been argued that the traditional discourses on feminist theories concerning motherhood neglect African American women (Gilham, 2012; Roberts, 2014). According to Roberts (2014), significant racial disparities exist concerning child protection both inside and outside of the criminal judicial system, and Black families experience closer scrutiny that results in higher instances of child welfare system placement of their children.

During and following maternal imprisonment, changes in living arrangements are common, and they often affect children's relationships with their siblings (Waid, 2014). When children of incarcerated parents do not reside in the same household, regular sibling visitation seldom occurs (Foster & Hagan, 2014). This prevents siblings in different homes from advancing their relationships (Buist & Vermande, 2014). This is significant because women who are able to maintain strong family relationships achieve better parole success and are less likely to recidivate (Cunningham-Stringer & Barnes, 2012).

Gilham (2012) noted the sincere desire of African American mothers to successfully parent their children following incarceration. One challenge these families face is overcoming the sadness and fear that resulted from their separation. An additional barrier to family reunification is the often-underestimated feelings that other family members have concerning the separation.

The fear that formerly incarcerated women experience regarding social services negatively impacts their financial status. According to Gilham (2012), fear of losing custody causes many mothers to reject social welfare programs. These mothers acknowledged their need to find an effective way to constructively interact, discipline, and set limits for their children without involvement from the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) agents (Garcia, 2016). After examining the degree to which child protection workers monitored African American families and the frequency of placing African American children in foster care, Roberts (2014) noted how fear kept many formerly incarcerated women from pursuing assistance from child protective services. This fear of losing child custody — whether real or perceived – became a genuine barrier to seeking any supportive services (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

The children of currently and formerly incarcerated mothers commonly experience educational challenges (Dallaire, 2019). Strained mother-child relationships due to separation cause many children to exhibit emotional, intellectual, and cognitive delays (Hagan & Foster, 2014). The educational challenges of African American children whose parents had been incarcerated were particularly serious when the parents had little education.

Children of incarcerated parents report feeling unsafe, insecure, and uncertain about their future (Boudin, 2011). This was even the case when mothers were incarcerated for short periods or inconsistently over many years. Children who believe that parents have no control over their own lives do not trust their parents to protect them (Garcia, 2016).

Multiple parental incarcerations have pernicious effects on children. The perpetual grieving from the repeated loss of their mothers often results in behavior problems at home and in school, poor academic progress, and assorted mental health issues (Hagan & Foster, 2012, 2014). The grief of parental estrangement is compounded when children are subjected to multiple incarcerations of their parents. Any relief that children experience upon their parent's release resorts back to grief when the parent returns to prison (Shwartz-Soicher et al., 2011). For many young children this cycle of pain and anger is hard to comprehend and is worse than the finality of death (Hagan et al., 2012).

Children experiencing the profound disappointment from each subsequent loss of their mothers due to incarceration requires unvarying investigation (Chavis, 2012). Children commonly worry as much about their incarcerated parents as their parents worry about them (Graham & Harris, 2013). Frequently, rifts develop between the mother, the child, and the caregiver when children are unable to analyze or cope with their feelings (Miller & Barnes, 2015). In many cases, the mother lacks the necessary skills to address the issues her children are facing, which exposes emotions she is unable to rectify (Craigie, 2011; Poehlmann, Shalfer, Maes, & Hanneman, 2008; Shantz et al., 2009). Often, the response of women experiencing this type of family breakdown is to avoid facing her role in the debacle (Shantz et al., 2009)

Teenagers maintain an increased risk for delinquency when they have experienced the incarceration of a parent. According to Kissane (2012), troubled youth are less trusting of others, exhibit more conflicts with neighbors, and join gangs at higher rates

than adolescents with stable home lives. Mothers who have experienced multiple incarcerations frequently struggle to parent teenagers with gang connections, and the mother's mental health suffers greatly in this situation due to the stress involved (Folk, Dallaire, & Zeman, 2014).

A social conscience can fail to develop in individuals whose mothers are absent due to incarceration (Manning, 2011). Lei et al. (2014) indicates that proper programming for impacted teens increases social conscience and moral convictions, while reducing risky and impulsive behaviors. It also discourages troubled teens from bonding with deviant peers and promotes interaction with pro-social peers.

When the previously incarceration parent does return home, according to Gelb et al., (2012) family dynamics shift, stress levels increase, and additional strain is placed on an already overwhelmed environment. As noted by Aaron and Dallaire (2010), each family member must adjust their personal habits to accommodate the other members of the household in order to decrease family conflict. Parole requirements also impact family relationships (Maschi et al., 2013). For example, children are often separated from siblings and other family members when their mother is assigned to a halfway house or required to attend substance abuse treatment (Graham & Harris, 2013). In addition, families with multiple children often have multiple fathers, which further increases the likelihood of sibling separation. This situation complicates post-incarceration adjustment for women who must negotiate relationships with different men before they can place their life back in order (Richie, 2012).

The likelihood of African American children having one or both parents incarcerated is statistically high (Bush, 2012). According to Waid (2014), one out of every three African American males born in 2003 will at some time in their life, experience incarceration. It is reported that the chances of being incarcerated in a prison is higher for men (95%) than women (1%) and highest for Blacks (16%), followed by Hispanics (9%) and then Whites (2%) (Beck & Boncazar, 2010). With Black men having the highest risk of imprisonment compared any other group, mothers are left behind to raise the children on their own with the associated economic strain (Manning, 2011). In the situation where both parents are involved in criminality and experience concurrent incarceration, children grow up struggling to face the consequences of absent, restrictive, and unresponsive parents (Shemmings et al., 2012). The absence of engaged and committed parents has been identified as the greatest risk factor for continued family problems (Geller et al., 2011).

Family Reintegration

Many African American women face numerous obstacles that limit their ability to smoothly transition from prison back into their communities and hinder their reconnection to family and children (Barrick, 2014). The withholding of information from children concerning their mother's incarceration – from arrest to prison – makes it difficult to establish a healthy relationship upon release (Foster & Hagan, 2014). This failure to adequately support the children of incarcerated mothers frequently results in anxiety, depression, and in some cases severe emotional damage (Mouzon, 2013).

Regardless of their mother's crimes, children deserve to have a relationship with their incarcerated parent (Turney et al., 2012; Epstein, 2013). A profound disregard for the rights of children occurs when representatives from the justice system fail to inform children concerning what is happening with their parent at the time of their arrest (Ayre, 2012). In many cases, grandparents and other caregivers also neglect to inform children about their mother's incarceration, and many fail to reassure children of their mother's intention to remain in their lives (Craigie, 2011). Upon parental incarceration, children often feel alienated and are left with little feelings of authority over their own lives (Epstein, 2013). The systemic failure to encourage successful rehabilitation of mothers or address the need to support parental relationships with their children often results in lifelong harm to children, parents, and the familial relationship in general (Boudin, 2011).

The handover of parental authority from caregiver to returning parent is often a strained affair as parents transitioning from prison life to independence move from positions of being externally controlled to establishing internal self-control, and many women need assistance in their move to independent decision-making (Opsal & Foley, 2013). Typically, the caregivers of the children of incarcerated women, play a pivotal role in mediating the transitions for the formerly incarcerated parent (Graham & Harris, 2013). While adapting to the discontinuation of routines associated with prison life, the newly released parent must adjust to routines established by the caregiver, while overcoming any stigmas attached to their previous loss of independence (Sheehan, 2014).

It is not uncommon for courts to remove children from tired and overwhelmed caregivers and reunite them with their newly released mothers before they are prepared to

accept the responsibilities of parenting (Graham & Harris, 2013). Problems quickly emerge for these newly reunited families who often experiences extreme challenges because of a lack of accessibility to resources, and consequently, children act out, further complicating the situation (Dallaire, 2019). For success to be achieved, these families require a multi-method approach of providing supportive services that includes systemic

The breakdown of trust in the reunification process is exacerbated by a lack of resources. Repatriated women are forced to rely on others to help them reestablish their parental role (Clear, 2007). Trust is destroyed when social workers, probation officers, and family members provide inaccurate information to newly repatriated women (Pullen et al., 2014). A social service directory created by Easter Seals, called the "Blue Book," which is like a phone book of resources for newly released convicts, is only published biannually. Hence, frustration ensues because many of the services have changed, resources have been discontinued, fees are absent or not incorrect, and many contacts include people who are no longer affiliated with the organization (Tabasa, Kajoka, & Willemsen, 2014). The lack of supportive resources is a significant factor affecting societal and family reunification (Salina, et al., 2011).

Strained relationships between previously incarcerated women and family members, their children, and caregivers of their children, often adversely affect their capability to effectively manage their affairs (Sheehan, 2014). For women who are attempting to regain control of their lives, the stress of outside expectations has a negative effect on their actions (Tangeman & Hall, 2011). Similarly, having to deal with other people's judgments concerning their ability to manage their own lives and take care

of their children increases women's risk of relapse and recidivism (Dallaire, 2019).

Without the necessary skills to appropriately respond to the needs of African American

women who return home, families often inadvertently jeopardize their fragile recovery

status. It is critical that the counselors, social workers, parole officers, and family

members who work with this population help them prepare for their return by being

aware of the mental and physical health challenges they face and the parenting issues

they will confront (Collica, 2010; Stevens-Watkins et al., 2014).

For numerous African American women, the effects of their negative lifestyles

are apparent long before their incarceration, and corresponding ramifications are difficult

to disentangle (Alexander-Floyd, 2014). The process of reintegration back to society and

rejoining their families is more difficult for paroled women with a background of drug

abuse (Tomita, 2013). A study by Garcia (2016) revealed that 67% of women with drug

problems also experienced difficulty securing safe and affordable housing. Pullen et al

(2014) noted that drug use was a primary factor contributing to high rates of recidivism

among formerly incarcerated women.

Scholars have determined the important role that mental health plays in the ability

of formerly incarcerated women to maintain stability (Mouzon, 2013; Beck & Boncazar,

2010; National Women's Law Center, 2012). Changes in legislation that mandated the

release of uninsured mentally ill patients from psychiatric hospitals has brought negative

repercussions, which have affected the American prison system (Ayre, 2012). Despite

limited mental health experience, prison staff have been forced to adapt to a prison

population that demonstrates profound mental incapacitation (Beck & Boncazar, 2010;

BJS, 2020; Jarrett et al., 2012; Salina et al., 2011). Without appropriate and consistent care that addresses emotional and mental health during incarceration, women return home with mental health problems that have gone undetected and untreated. Under these circumstances, women experience great difficulty in re-establishing familial relationships (Schnittker et al., 2012).

For a healthy lifestyle, it is essential for families to reside in communities with affordable and safe housing (Turney & Wildeman, 2013). When given the choice, individuals select living places that offer desirable social amenities (Wood, 2014). However, after returning home following multiple incarcerations, many African American women are challenged to locate affordable housing within safe communities, due to their poor credit (Sheehan, 2014). This housing crisis contributes to circumstances wherein women are forced to abandon their needs and desires following their release and reside with family, friends, or in substandard accommodations they can afford (Desmond, 2012).

Successful societal reintegration is dependent on the nature and composition of the community (Comfort, 2012). Following incarceration, the majority of prisoners return to the same communities that they lived in before they were incarcerated (BJS, 2020). When attempting to reintegrate, women must compete for the same set of resources as other women in similar situations (Pare & Felson, 2014). As noted by Clear (2007), disadvantaged neighborhoods suffered further deterioration due to the problem of mass incarceration. As a form of coercive mobility, mass incarceration destabilizes neighborhoods when offenders are removed and when they return (Muraskin, 2012).

As noted by Christian and Thomas (2009), the environment and conditions in which people live have a substantial effect on their quality of life. Upon returning to their distressed neighborhoods, African American women struggle to pay bills and the assorted costs of raising their children (Heimer et al., 2012). The ability to prepare nutritious meals for their children impacted how formerly incarcerated women engage with family and community (Patton, 2012). Neighborhoods with limited access to grocery stores are effectively food deserts. Without transportation to shop elsewhere, women are forced to shop at expensive local corner stores where fresh produce is unavailable.

The existence of shared norms, beliefs, and values are a common feature of communities (Wood, 2014). According to Wilson and Kelling (1982), their broken windows theory explains that the vulnerability of neighborhoods where high rates of crime and poverty exists, invites further deterioration and access for criminals. Inhabitants of economically disadvantaged neighborhoods with high rates of crime and violence have limited access to jobs, and thus lack the ability to leave (Lei et al., 2014). From an intergenerational perspective, this creates a vicious circle where children and their offspring suffer similar circumstances.

When struggling with their many challenges, families need support and assistance (Geller et al., 2011). Families who have experienced incarceration have an urgent need for therapeutic interventions (Graham & Harris, 2013). Group programs that permit children to dwell with their recovering mothers have proven effective for both children and mothers by providing opportunities for mothers to acquire coping, interpersonal, and parenting skills by observing mothers who have experienced similar backgrounds

(Collica, 2010). The mutual support women gain when they share their life stories with other residents who have experienced similar traumas results in improved recovery (Jarrett et al., 2012).

Utilizing case studies was the ideal approach to analyze how incarceration affected African American women. In addition, the multi-case approach confirmed perceptions and social practices not addressed in previous literature (Yin, 2013). The accounts of women's experiences before and during incarceration yielded valuable insight into their family dynamics (Richie, 2012). However, these findings also suggest rival explanations. As noted by Yin (2013), when diverse statements present themselves, researchers seek additional cases to confirm that other explanations have been thoroughly reviewed.

An examination of the many problems faced by formerly incarcerated African American women when they return home unveils a variety of historical and social issues that influence their behavior and affect how they perceive themselves and negotiate their relationships with others (Irby, 2014). Salina et al. (2011) identified social practices as a structuration, wherein practice and structure form a transformational loop. In the component theory of structuration, social life transcends random acts, which are determined by social forces that are in a relationship with one another (Hildebrand & Martel, 2012). Experiences from the past merge with the present to form structuration since all actions are a continuation of the past. Whether negative or positive, women process their experiences of multiple incarcerations and social change over time.

Reintegration and Associated Social Impacts and Risks

It is common for unaddressed risk factors prior to incarceration to be exacerbated during the reintegration process (Pflugradt & Allen, 2014). Any difficulties that the mother experienced prior to incarceration complicated the reintegration process with her family, especially her children (McIntyre, 2013). Christian (2009) exposed how maternal incarceration independently affected children's behavior, academic performance, and mental health.

Social capital is greater for intact families than for single-mother African American families who typically do not have the means to maintain strong family structures (Ravanera & Rajulton, 2010). After repatriation, single-parent African American women generally have limited social capital with regard to relationships involving kin, friends, peers, and neighbors (BJS, 2020). Lacking a diverse and reliable network, repatriated mothers experience a high degree of stress (Ravanera & Rajulton, 2010). Without social capital, women are forced to depend on community resources while they attempt to reestablish networks of support. After multiple stints of incarceration, African American women have substantial difficulties reintegrating with their families, and there are limited formulaic solutions to address their complex problems (Clear, 2007).

Many women have a difficult time attempting to transform their lives away from criminal activity. Their experiences while incarcerated affect their lives long after release, creating another hurdle to successful reintegration to civilian life (Shantz et al., 2009). The result is a perpetual loop of incarceration followed by minimal time in the world or

on the streets – terms commonly used by formerly incarcerated women to distinguish between periods of incarceration and their times of being free.

Ultimately, policy is the main variable that accounts for the growth in prison population. Specifically, policy influences the number of people who enter prison and how long they stay. In order for African American to achieve successful societal reintegration, Ayre (2012) suggested the need for a careful review of policy.

Housing and Community

Cook and Williams (2015) identified a parallel between disruptive and unstable housing conditions and disrupted and uncertain family relationships. Generally, less than half of the children of incarcerated mothers visit them in prison. Under these conditions, it is difficult for mothers to sustain relationships with their children (Rahimipour & Boostani, 2014).

The post-incarceration challenge for African American women to acquire safe, suitable, and affordable housing detrimentally effects their family stability (McLanahan et al., 2010). Upon release from prison, most women have to rely on public assistance and family support, since they have little to no source of income (BJS, 2020). Under these conditions, repatriated women have a hard time securing gainful employment, which in turn blocks their ability to live in safe communities because they cannot afford market-value rent (BJS, 2020).

Out of options, these families end up in deteriorating, crime-ridden neighborhoods, amongst other individuals with a history of criminality engagement or criminal justice system contact (Schmallenger, 2011). It is no surprise that women of

color make up a disproportionate number of America's poor who are forced to reside in impoverished neighborhoods (Davis, 2013). The exposure to violence, crime, and drugs in these communities place families at risk (Fedock et al., 2013). Formerly incarcerated African American women residing in these deleterious communities face an increased chance of recidivism due to their unfortunate environmental conditions (Schmallenger, 2011).

As single heads of their household without financial assistance from a partner, African American women commonly fall behind on their rent, which leads to high rates of evictions (Opsal & Foley, 2013). Women with a history of eviction find it was hard to obtain housing in decent neighborhoods, even low-income and public housing (Desmond, 2012). Ultimately, formerly incarcerated African American women generally reside in the worst areas where the social ills of poverty infect every aspect of their family's lives.

To develop responses to the social problems associated with urban poverty and high incarceration rates, researchers generally focus on minorities, families, and neighborhoods (Cook & Willams, 2015). Women with multiple incarcerations experience changes in their relationships with family and friends (Cook et al., 2015; Muraskin, 2012). Cook et al., (2013) identified the long-term implications of how living arrangements affected children's ability to maintain relationships with their siblings, fathers, extended family, and mothers following maternal incarceration. Springer (2012) asserted that existing programs inadequately prepare incarcerated women for family and societal reintegration. Restrictions to funding – due to tax cuts and reallocations – resulted in even less preliminary planning assistance for affected women. The failure of

correctional facilities to address personal challenges concerning family contact and support and to provide adequate discharge planning hurt women's abilities to secure appropriate housing and stifle opportunities to resolve anxieties they encounter when they seek to reintegrate back into their families (Wright & Cesar, 2013).

Finally, to obtain increased understanding of the challenges that African American women with multiple incarcerations experience when attempting to maintain and/or negotiate their maternal identities, as well as reintegrating back into their families and community, examination of how living environments contribute to the deterioration of their maternal and family relationships needs to be reviewed (Wright & Cesar, 2013). Throughout the United States, affordable housing has become increasingly limited (Desmond, 2012). Between the gentrification of neighborhoods and the sway in public policy away from social support for repatriated individuals, the acquisition of affordable housing has become an increasingly rare occurrence (National Women's Law Center, 2012).

Summary

This section provided a comprehensive overview of the literature through the examination of studies relating to mass incarceration and the role of racism and poverty within the lives of African American women. It addressed gender and moral conscience development, along with the social and psychological adjustments necessary for African American women to experience successful maternal maintenance and familial reintegration. Reintegration risk factors together with the social capital influences that are associated with mother-child relationships were evaluated, along with any barriers that

could potentially increase the difficulty for successful maternal maintenance and family reintegration. African American women's own perceptions of the multiple incarcerations that they have experienced and how it affected the stability of their maternal relationships and continuity were also examined throughout this literature review.

This review provided a substrate to evaluate how African American women with multiple incarcerations adjust to a myriad of social issues, such as underemployment, lack of housing, the loss of child custody, and challenges to reestablishing trusting relationships with family members. Previous researchers identified the many difficulties associated with the reintegration process, including the maintenance of both mother-child and romantic relationships. The literature presented supports the additional necessity of examining African American women's perceptions concerning their incarceration experiences and how they affected their family relationships. The next chapter describes the design and methodology of this study and delineates how data was collected.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This qualitative multiple case study was designed for the purpose of examining the dynamics and perceptions of African American women who have experienced incarceration and comprehend the effects their absences had on their maternal relationships while incarcerated, in addition to perceptions they had of themselves as mothers. In this context, dynamics refers to changes that occurred within maternal and family relationships and processes relating to African American women's absence from their children and families due to incarceration. This qualitative study using a multiple-case design involved detailed participant narratives and descriptions that were bound by time.

This section includes the research design and rationale for this case study. It includes trustworthiness issues, methodology information and analysis, central concepts, and data collection methods. The plan for addressing ethical concerns is documented in this chapter, along with a summary of information highlighted in the chapter.

Research Design and Research Rationale

Qualitative methods were selected to examine processes that occur when African American women attempt to reclaim their parenting roles following incarceration. The research question that was explored in this study is:

RQ1: How does incarceration influence African American women's perceptions regarding their ability to maintain their maternal roles?

This study involved adopting a qualitative methodology with a multiple embedded case study design to investigate how specific processes associated with incarceration, influence women's reformation of maternal identity post-incarceration.

Qualitative research involves examining the experiences of individuals in detail. This study involved using the inside perspective, which is an interpretive approach for gaining understanding of lived experiences of participants from their personal perspectives. Hennick et al. (2011) said with qualitative research, scholars obtain a significant understanding of the topic, which enables them to examine complex phenomena, while giving a voice to participants and gaining understanding relative to processes they experience. I desired to gain insight regarding the experiences of previously incarcerated African American women by examining their reconnection to parenting and exploring their views about maternal identity. This enabled rich and complex comparisons of participants' accounts, which would not be possible using surveys due to inherent restrictions.

To ensure maximum variation and multiple perspectives from the research participants, I used a purposive sampling technique for this study. Maximum variation is ideal for identifying disparities between participants when the goal is to highlight a wide range of perspectives regarding a research topic (Maykut & Moorehouse, 2002; Patton, 1990). For this study, maximum variation served as a strategy for recruitment to discern participant differences and similarities with regard to their experiences. This in-depth interviewing procedure permitted me to describe processes that previously incarcerated

African American women experience when they attempt to reform their maternal identity by reclaiming their parenting role from their child's caregiver.

Taking a qualitative methods approach and using Black feminist epistemology allowed for an exploration of parenting experiences according to African American women. I created a semi-structured guide to facilitate in-depth interviews of all participants and ensure standardization of the entire interview process. Along with the interview guide, upon the conclusion of data collection, I conducted member checking. This ensured that my interpretations accurately reflected participants' varied experiences. Additionally, inductive and deductive forms of analysis were used. In addition, questions relating to parenting, coparenting, reconnection to parental roles, and maternal identity from the interview guide were code. Since few studies focus on return to parenting following incarceration, it was critically important to interview formerly incarcerated women to gain accurate insights regarding their experiences.

Conceptual Framework

Black feminist theory and critical criminology were the theoretical frameworks for this study. It is crucial to acknowledge that oppression and societal attitudes influence and impact perceptions of self-worth and self-image, dealing with poverty, examining disruptions within families, and successfully reintegrating into families and communities following incarceration.

The theories of critical criminology and Black feminism intersected to assist with explaining the social reality of formerly incarcerated African American women who have been sentenced to multiple prison terms.

Research Methodology

Case studies provide an opportunity to examine a topic in depth and expose the nature of a problem via detailed documentation of participants' responses (Yin, 2013). Perceptions that were articulated by participants who were interviewed for this study helped in terms of addressing the fluidity of their maternal roles, due to experiences with incarceration.

Instrumentation

For the purpose of the interviews, I designed the interview questions as a semi-structured guide. This means of collecting data to answer relative research questions provide an accurate and sufficient platform to record information directly from the participant. The primary research question, along with a review of the literature, determined the interview questions utilized. Understanding that the participants were likely used to lines of inquiry addressing their family demographics, criminal histories, and incarcerations, questions were deliberately created that would encourage participants to provide detailed responses. The researcher served as the primary instrument, adjusting questions based on the participants' capacity to ponder, reflect, and respond (Canada, 2011; Yin, 2013).

Participants were afforded the freedom to decide what and how much they were comfortable sharing. By permitting this level of participant control, the participants were empowered with freedom of choice (Gove et al., 2011). It was a high priority to create a relaxed and conversational atmosphere for the interview, allowing each woman to take her time and share her story in her own way. This neutralized the possibility of bias and

minimized any feelings of shame or stigma (Abma & Stake, 2014; Yin, 2013). Since there is no way of knowing what participants were willing to share, the women were empowered to guide the interview process (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013).

All finalized questions were approved by the Walden's Institutional Review Board and my committee to assure appropriateness and to assist with establishing content validity. Due to concerns regarding the participants' language and comprehension levels – particularly those without high-school educations – the researcher discussed the questions with colleagues in the field of psychology, who have previously conducted research to ensure content validity, and to make certain that they were easy to comprehend and that they facilitated the opportunity to closely investigate the women's responses by encouraging deep introspection.

After securing each participant's permission, I audio-recorded the interviews, which were transcribed at a later date. According to Yin (2013), audio recordings are sufficient methods for assisting with answering research questions, as they are supportive of accurately capturing and recording the statements provided by the participants, to allow for accurate data analysis. During the interviews, handwritten notes were utilized by the researcher, which were used during the analysis process to confirm the findings. For clarification purposes, and in keeping with the protocol of the interview, occasionally the questions were rephrased. This strategy afforded the opportunity to obtain additional – anecdotal and nostalgic – commentary from the participants.

Procedures For Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I began the research study process. Advertisements and invitations were sent out and posted, to achieve interest from potential participants. A survey that allowed the potential participants to provide demographic information, such as criminal and incarceration history, personal demographics, and demographic information about their children, was provided to all respondents via email. It was communicated on the survey and via email, that all potential participants that return their demographic information, would be agreeing to participate in the research study, however that they were not required to participate or answer any demographic information. Once a participant returned their survey and participation acknowledgment, informed consent, a description of the study, ethical standards, how to contact the researcher should they have questions about the research project and/or participation, and potential risks and benefits was sent to each participant. Respondents were also asked to communicate to other potential participants, and forward the researcher contact information to communicate participation interest.

Interested participants were asked to meet with the researcher at her private office or via telecommunications application such as Zoom or FaceTime, to ask additional questions, complete consent forms, if they were not able to electronically sign them, and begin the interview process. The researcher collected all data provided by the participants. Data collection interviews were anticipated to be between one to one and a half hours long, for only one session, but the researcher blocked out three, one hour windows to avoid time constraints interfering with the interview and data collection

process. Data was recorded on researcher developed questionnaire, hand-written notes,

and through audio recording.

Upon exit and completion of data collection, all participants were informed that

they could receive the results of the study at a later date and could request a copy of the

results during the debriefing or were informed how to request results in writing if

interested. During the debriefing, each participant was provided with resources to

supportive and therapeutic services, to assist with any traumas that may have occurred

during the interviews, by discussing their previous incarnations and maternal challenges.

Alternative phone numbers were requested to increase the chances of connecting with the

participants for member checking. Additional marketing online platforms such as Survey

Monkey and Facebook would have been done, if initial recruitment measures would have

failed to result in enough participants.

<div align="center">**Population**</div>

The sample population derived for this research only included African American

women who have at least one child, who reside in Las Vegas, Nevada, and those that

have been minimally imprisoned on two occasions, for at least 6 months, for each

instance of incarceration, and is therefore homogenous. Women who were incarcerated

on only one occasion, and for less than 6 months, failed to meet the criteria relative to

study participation, and were therefore ineligible and excluded. Additional criteria for

inclusion in this study is a minimum age of 18, at least one child that is at least age 17 or

younger, and the ability to speak English. The database from State of Nevada Department

of Corrections was instrumental in helping to determine the sample population, since it

contains criminal histories as part of its public records. This database was as a supporting

mechanism to substantiate stories from the women who self-identified with multiple

incarcerations, age, and other pertinent demographic information. In addition, the women

were asked to provide documentation that confirmed their age, multiple incarcerations,

and ages of children, including old identification cards, birth certificates of children,

court documents, and other significant legal data.

Sample

In order to identify previously incarcerated African American women who sought

to reclaim their parenting role, this study utilized a purposive sampling strategy. It is

strongly believed that the employment of this strategy resulted in a wealth of information

that evolved to enrich our understanding of the topic (Yin, 2013). As determined by

Miles and Huberman (1994), there are three significant benefits to using purposive

sampling: (1) it acquires the experiences of typical individuals in the target population;

(2) it acquires the experiences of individuals who are considered atypical or deviant

within the target population; and (3) it acquires disconfirming cases, which are the

experiences of individuals who are deemed to be the exceptions to the rule. The use of

qualitative research limits the selection to a small group of participants, which allows for

comprehensive examination of the issues and also assists in the ability to clarify

potentially conflicting information.

Using this purposive sampling strategy, and to provide a maximum variation of

experiences, 12 participants were selected. Women who were interviewed for the study

shared relatively similar experiences, with only minor rival or competing information.

Thus, due to the accurate replications, there is no need for a greater sample size to reach saturation (Creswell, 2009). Saturation is obtained when adding additional participants to a research study, does not result in enhanced or additional perspectives or information relative to the examined phenomenon (Creswell, 2009).

To gain a comprehensive account of the process associated with reclaiming parental roles and reforming maternal identity, this study only examined the experiences of formerly incarcerated women. To maximize the variation of this sample, the following predetermined criteria, based on my research questions, decided eligibility for this study: (1) mothers that had children ranging from infancy to age 18; (2) mothers that had been imprisoned more than once as an adult; (3) mothers that had been released for at least one month, but less than three years (to ensure that any crisis mode had passed, while their ability to remember the challenges associated with resuming their parental role was still fresh); (4) mothers that either parented alone or shared parenting; and (5) mothers that had been incarcerated in prison for at least one year as an adult.

For the purposes of this study, a contrast was drawn between women who were placed in jail and women who were incarcerated in prisons due to the stark contrasts that these experiences had on the women's state of mind. The proximity of jails allowed families easier access to visitation. Furthermore, jails are generally for short-term or temporary confinement, where incarcerated women may maintain hope of winning their case or being released on bond (Bradley & Davion, 2007). In contrast, prison incarceration is reserved for those who have been convicted and are destined for a long-term stay (Ayre, 2012). Due to the fact that prisons are often positioned in relatively

remote areas, visitation can be potentially expensive and logistically difficult. Any hope

of not being convicted is abandoned, and rules for visitation can be restrictive. Women in

this situation are forced to cope with the reality of long-term confinement, family

separation, and the despair of being away from their children.

Recruitment

To recruit participants, flyers (see Appendix C) were distributed at various public

locations, including Lutheran Services, treatment programs, support groups for women,

Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers, HOPE for Prisoners, and halfway houses.

Agencies within the Las Vegas metropolitan area that cater to formerly incarcerated

women were also courted to assist in recruitment efforts by requesting to post flyers at

their respective locations. While these agencies were not neutral spaces, they are

generally sites where previously incarcerated women have established trusting

relationships.

Research Question

The following research question was used for this study:

RQ1: How does incarceration influence African American women's perceptions

regarding their ability to maintain their maternal roles?

Role as a Researcher and Ethical Considerations

My fundamental role was to serve as the principal instrument to monitor and

collect participant data via both semi-structured and in-depth interviews. In order to

encourage participants to provide elaborative and meaningful comments, open-ended

questions that required more than a yes or no answer were utilized. (Refer to Appendix B

for interview sample questions.) Probing questions drawn from participant's comments and responses were implemented to generate these deeper meanings, (e.g., could you please explain or please elaborate?). I desired to elicit the motivations behind their statements by seeking clarification of their responses and assessing the meanings of their gestures. In addition to building rapport with my participants by treating their statements with respect, I assured the women that their privacy would be protected.

High ethical standards were maintained for the study. The database from State of Nevada Department of Corrections will supply access to some of the participants data, as it is a forum that is available to the public. The participants also provided data regarding themselves, and signed informed consent forms, articulating their consent to furnish data for the sake of the study (Refer to Appendix A for an informed consent sample). Major considerations include professional responsibility to the participants, potential conflicts of interest, dilemmas emerging from the naturalistic inquiry, and prevention of harm to others. Potential power differentials were minimized since it was communicated to the participants that the researchers will maintain no ability to alter, improve, or adjudicate their legal situation.

To address ethical concerns relative to recruitment processes, incentives to participate in the study were minimal. No financial compensation was offered or implied, and participants were informed that they have the right to refuse research participation. At the completion of the interview, small toiletry items costing less than $5.00, such as hand lotion, body soap, etc., was offered as thank you gifts to acknowledge my appreciation of their time in aiding my comprehension of the topics related to the study.

In order to emphasize that gifts are not being given in exchange for completing the interview, every participant was informed that they would receive the gift, including those who failed to complete the interview.

To address ethical concerns relating to data collection, informed consent was imperative. It was made clear to all participants, that they were free to withdraw from participation at any time and could do so without penalty. Although I did not anticipate that this study would bring any additional harm to the participants, they were all provided with the perceived risks and benefits of contributing to this study, as well as a thorough explanation regarding the possibility of re-living painful events in the course of describing their family experiences and incarcerations. Due to the presence of this potential risk, participants were given a list of resources, including local mental health agencies that could provide therapeutic support if the need arose, and ones that would be available to see them immediately and/or with minimal waiting time. To eliminate the possibility of potential relationships, women incarcerated at the one of the local detention centers in Las Vegas before 2017 were viable candidates, as the researcher began working within the correctional community in 2017. To manage potential for researcher bias, participants were asked to review the appropriate data relative to their interviews, to ensure that my interpretations is an accurate representation of their experiences, feelings, and beliefs (Creswell, 2009).

Process of Informed Consent

In detail and with each participant, consent forms were reviewed, including all relevant information, such as procedures and purpose, risks and benefits, participation

alternatives, etc.. Following this thorough explanation of the consent form (Refer to Appendix A for an informed consent sample) and of the study, the women were encouraged to ask questions and have their concerns addressed before proceeding. After consenting to participate in this research project, the researcher inquired one additional time to ensure that each participant had all of their questions and concerns addressed.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

To heighten the trustworthiness and credibility of this research project, consultation of the work of naturalistic researchers who established an educational foundation to determine trustworthiness will occur (Guba, 1981). Using a consistent series of interview questions, the researcher will establish trustworthiness and credibility that induces additional lines of inquiry as participants become increasingly committed to sharing their stories and responding to the questions posed during interviews (Elo et al., 2014). To successfully evaluate the effects that multiple incarcerations had on women's maternal identity and role, focus on behaviors and relationships the women had with their children and families was imperative (Cunningham-Stringer & Barnes, 2012).

Providing women with a voice in which they could safely reveal their experiences was critical for processing the totality of the issues that women with multiple incarcerations were forced to endure (Hemmings, 2011). I questioned the participants concerning the essence of the relationship with their family members and children prior to incarceration, in order to delineate the changes in their maternal relationships following incarceration, with particular attention to any shifts that occurred as a result of their imprisonment. The participants were encouraged to highlight the changes through

the use of photographs, relative certificates and records, and any other documents that

could shed light on their life before and after multiple incarcerations. The researcher's

decision to use multiple sources of evidence in a manner that encouraged a connection

between lines of inquiry allows me to ensure the participants credibility and

trustworthiness during data collection (Yin, 2013). To establish credibility member

checks were employed. According to Yin (2013) credibility entails establishing that the

data and results derived from a qualitative research project are accurate and are a

reflection of the perspectives of the participant(s). Member checks involve sharing the

findings with the participant(s), to ensure that they are an accurate representation of their

true feelings (Guba, 1981).

Although variability was anticipated despite the use of an audit trail (field notes,

memos, etc.), which ensured that the same baseline questions were utilized, the adherence

to baseline-question consistency allowed the opportunity to assemble data from other

situations. Given the various realities that existed for the participants – in relation to the

effects that their incarcerations had on them, their maternal identities, and the

relationships that they had with their children and family members — it was optimal to

have a line of inquiry to better understand the key issues (Guba, 1981; Yin, 2013).

Transferability examines a study's ability to transfer the restive results past the

boundaries of the current research study (Creswell, 2009). Within this project, a detailed

description of the accounts as articulated by the participants, that is supportive of the

accounts that were communicated by the participants, were examined to achieve

transferability. Also detailed descriptions of the framework and data were provided,

which supports obtaining transferability, and can save time by not having to replicate research design and findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Confirmability involves the degree of accuracy that is associated with the study's findings and serves as a means to verify that the data has been influenced and derived by the participants, as opposed to the involvement, characteristics, and/or potential biases of the researcher (Yin, 2013). To ensure that the accuracy of the participants stories have been accurately captured, member checking was employed (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2013). Dependability, which assists with establishing the findings from a research project (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), was ensured through audit trials. An audit trail will track responses, and NVivo will assist with maintaining accurate thematic statements. These strategies will allow for recognition when similar responses are provided by the participants, which will indicate that saturation is achieved on a specific line of inquiry (QSR International, 2015).

Management of Data Collection

For the objectives of this project, it is imperative to maintain an organized data collection system. All of the interviews were tape recorded and notes were kept on the women's inquiry responses, with the consent of the participants. Afterwards, the information was transcribed. Records were stored in folders labeled with "IT" for interviews that are conducted on the telephone and "IP" for interviews that were conducted in-person. Two-digit numbers identified the participants. For my reference, to consolidate the data 1-12 was employed, (e.g., the first person was identified as 01). For future reference, interview dates and times were recorded.

Maintaining participant anonymity was critical. Every attempt was made during the interviews to anticipate and manage the disclosure of personal and intimate data. For transcription purposes and to protect the identity of each interviewee, I requested that each participant select an available flower as a pseudonym to serve as their identifier that is used when referencing and/or describing each participant in my written comments. A name of a flower as a pseudonym was chosen for any participant that does not choose one, to guarantee that the respective data is not identifiable. Files were kept secure in a locked file cabinet, that is stored in the researchers solely accessible, secured office. All participant notes, documents, and tapes were shared according to the prescribed timeframe for record maintenance established by the state of Nevada and in keeping with the Walden Internal Review Board (IRB) process, and after five years, the research data will be destroyed, in accordance with Walden's IRB policy. For the purposes of data dissemination, the researcher will draft a narrative summary that describes the main results of the research study. This narrative summary was applied to a private social media page, and each participant was given the link and access code to view the narrative summary, should they want to do so. Participants can also email the researcher to request a copy of the narrative summary, if they want to do this.

Data Analysis

For the data analysis purposes, I used the principles set forth by Hennick, Hutter, and Bailey (2011), since their description of the process of qualitative data analysis utilizes the principles of deductive and inductive elements of analyses, as well as grounded theory. For methodological inquiry, the deductive approach permits researchers

to integrate a priori (*pre-determined*) content areas located in the literature as reasonable starting points (Hennick et al. 2011). However, with the inductive approach, the findings of the research manifest from the significant, dominant, or frequent themes ingrained within the raw data. As noted by these scholars, "deductive measures are employed to influence the initiation of inductive codes, to assist with recognizing precise concepts, issues of a contextual nature, or cultural references" (Hennick et al. 2011) p. 219). It is further advocated by (Hennick et al. 2011), for a moderate use of deductive codes, since they have the capacity to overshadow the data. Hence, a mixture of inductive and deductive codes is advised.

Successful data analysis requires the identification of commonalities and differences, along with repeating themes, and the ability to reduce data when identified categories demonstrate less density. It is also critical to determine how the data fits together, so it can be organized in a clear and meaningful manner. Hennick, Hutter, and Bailey (2011) suggest the following steps for qualitative data analysis: (1) data preparation, (2) code development, (3) codebook creation, (4) code quality evaluation, and (5) confirmation of transparency and interpretive validity. With regard to data preparation, (Hennick et al. 2011) demand that careful attention is given to each specific task. This includes verbatim transcription of audio-recorded interviews and de-identification of the data to maintain participant anonymity.

The researcher designed a two-part design instrument, and used by the research participants, with the first part examining the participant and their child(ren) demographics, and the specifics about the participants criminal convictions and history.

The second part of the instrument was composed of questions that examine specifics regarding the participants maternal identity and parental and family dynamics. This instrument assisted the researcher with having better insight relative to the types of questions to ask the participants during the in-depth interviews, as well as provide insight relative to the research question.

Analysis of the data requires determination of repeating themes, the differences, and the similarities, in addition to being able to recognize when categories maintain less density and reduce the relative data. Also, it is imperative to be able to organize the data is a purposeful manner, to make determinations as to how the data fits together and how the data addressed the research question.

NVivo assisted in the data analysis process, and because of my lacking experiences with this product, I conducted affinity coding (QSR International, 2015). Based on the women's statements, I organized the data and accommodate the coding themes structure. It was anticipated that NVivo software would serve as an excellent tool for gathering, organizing, and interpreting the data that is received from participant interviews (QSR International, 2015). Finally, files were utilized to store information, which allowed for an easy search for thematic statements and simple visualization of the respective data (QSR International, 2015).

Ultimate visualization and data organization and examination would be easily provided by the use of a graphic such as a flowchart or matrix (QSR International, 2015). Broad categories were created to place the statements that are made by the participants, as they begin to develop, and evolve into themes and patterns. When saturation was

reached within any thematic area, changing to different questions promoted supplemental responses from participants. Discrepant cases were thoroughly examined to provide explanations for the contradictions in the data, to strengthen the determinations gathered from the evolving patterns derived from the participants.

Summary

In this chapter, the processes that were utilized for participant selection and exploration of the methodology, led to the delivery of considerations of ethics within the study are examined. Some major considerations relative to ethics that were discussed are the processes of informed consent, power differentials, confidentiality, and mitigations to prevent causing harm. Subsequently, exploration of analysis, management, and storage of research data was initiated. Elo et al., (2014) endorsed the practices for care of subjects and data collection. Many scholars have examined the experiences relative to trauma and mental health within the community of African American women, as well as the connections that exists with sexism and classism, in additional to racism and oppression (Arditti & Few, 2008; Blakey & Hatcher, 2013; Salina et al.,2011, Wilder & Cain, 2011). Through the use of a series of in-depth interviews, this research project examined African American women that have experienced multiple incarnations and how these incarcerations influenced their ability to negotiate their maternal identity, and their relationships with their children both during and after incarceration. Chapter 4 will serve as presentation of the gathered data and a respective analysis. The data, the data analysis, and the statements made by the participants that expose their lived experiences and perceptions, contributed to the identification of thematic patterns, will be outlined.

Chapter 4: Study

Introduction

The purpose of my study is to explore how instances of repeat incarceration impact African American women's ability to negotiate their maternal identity, and how that affects their maternal relationships and family unit. I addressed how participants' maternal relationships were impacted by their repeat incarcerations, how those consequences influenced their feelings about their maternal identity, and how those feelings influenced their role in the lives of their children and family units. In this chapter, I outline population demographics, research setting, instrumentation, and methods that were implemented to collect and analyze data.

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

I conducted 12 interviews using a semi-structured guide. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim . In developing the semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B), I purposely included a range of demographic questions, along with semi-structured questions and topics of discussion designed to promote open-ended responses, and I included probes for each question. Three broad sections composed of 22 questions formed the basis of interviews. Lengths of interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes.

I examined African American women's parenting experiences prior to incarceration and reclamation of their parental roles from their children's caregivers following incarceration. I also focused on adjustments that women experienced after reclaiming their parenting roles. I addressed various relational processes with an

emphasis on the role that relationships play in influencing the maternal identity of formerly incarcerated mothers and assisting them in terms of reclamation of their parental roles. Interview probes, or follow up comments or questions, helped clarify responses and expand answers when necessary.

I asked each woman to choose a pseudonym (see Appendix B). In the case where participants declined to select a pseudonym, one was assigned in order to assure that all data remained deidentified. Demographic questions included contact information, education history, income history, employment status, marital/cohabitation status, number of biological children of minor age with whom they were seeking to reconnect, and amount of time since they had been released.

Participant Demographics

This study was composed of 12 formerly incarcerated African American women, all of whom had at least one minor age child (age 17 or younger). A wide range of experiences were present in this study. Out of the 12 women in the study, five had not completed their high school education, four had obtained a high school diploma or the equivalent, and three had attended college but had not graduated by the time of data collection. With regard to income, five women had an income, two women received public assistance, one woman received disability income, and one woman received child support. At the time of interviews, two of the women were married and 10 were single. Of the 10 single women, five were divorced, three had reportedly never married, and two were living with a same-sex partner.

Daisy

Daisy was a petite African American woman with a non-gender conformist style of dress. During the interview, she wore an oversized black t-shirt and a baseball cap. She was pleasant, soft-spoken, and easy to engage with. Overall, Daisy aroused empathy.

Daisy had been released 3 months prior to the interview after spending the past 2 years in prison. This was Daisy's second conviction; she reported having been incarcerated for 9 months for a previous offense. Upon release, Daisy's adoptive sister, who had been the caregiver for her two daughters, ages 4 and 7, took Daisy into her home.

Having completed the 11th grade at the time of the interview, Daisy was looking for employment. She was also hoping to win a lawsuit due to the treatment she received during the birth of her younger daughter at the county hospital, where she had been handcuffed during labor and delivery. At the time of her daughter's birth, Daisy was detained at the Department of Corrections before going to prison.

Daisy had already experienced significant losses in her life. She and her twin brother had been adopted by their maternal aunt and uncle. Her twin brother, biological older brother, and adoptive parents had all passed away. During the beginning of her incarceration, Daisy's mother was the relative caregiver for her children, but she too passed away. At that point, her adoptive sister took over as the caregiver for her two daughters. Despite uncontrolled diabetes mellitus, which affected her eyesight negatively, her adoptive sister continues to support Daisy and her daughters.

Dahlia

Dahlia was an upbeat African American woman who smiled a lot and seemed happy to participate in the interview. She was comfortable from the beginning. Dahlia was easy to engage with and open to discussion.

At the time of her interview, Dahlia had been out of prison for 3 years, after previously being incarcerated for the same amount of time. Dahlia resided in North Las Vegas with her husband, mother-in-law, and two minor children, ages 6 and 15. With a 9th grade education, Dahlia indicated that she wanted to pursue her GED. Dahlia was unemployed and on public assistance, but volunteered at her son's school.

Dahlia had a total of 14 children, but only 10 were alive at the time of the interview, ranging in age from 6 to 28. A maternal aunt adopted the older set of children, and a foster family adopted her 13-year-old daughter when she was 3 months old. Dahlia's current husband is her 6-year old son's biological father.

Dahlia reported that her 6-year old son is developmentally delayed. She gave birth to him prior to going to prison, and her mother-in-law became the kin caregiver. Dahlia noticed that her son's speech did not seem to be progressing at the same rate as her other children, which caused her to question his development. She stated that she could tell something was not quite right, and she brought it to the attention of his physician who arranged for special services. Her mother-in-law had failed to detect any delay with regards to his development. Thanks to early intervention, interventions to improve her son's motor activity and overall development were secured. According to Dahlia, before being overwhelmed by her drug use, she and her family had a solid bond. Dahlia regrets

the resentment that her children hold against her due to her history of incarceration. She is fearful that their resentment may incite them to repeat some of the same mistakes she made in her own life.

Violet

Violet was well-groomed with a youthful appearance. She was an African American woman who styled her hair in micro-braids and maintained sculpted eyebrows that appeared to be freshly waxed. She was talkative and seemed eager to share her story.

At the time of her interview, Violet had been out of prison for 2 months after serving a 3-year sentence, as well as two previous incarcerations in prison: one for 18 months and another for 5 years. She was residing in a transitional facility which provided support, including reentry services. Having completed the 11th grade, Violet was unemployed with no source of income. Securing employment and stable housing were Violet's primary goals during her reentry program.

Violet was the parent of five children and had been divorced for 16 years. Only two of her children were still minors. One was 14 and the other was 17 at the time of her interview. During her incarceration, the biological father of the 14-year old and his parents cared for both children. Following her release, Violet and her biological parents shared parenting responsibilities for the 14-year old child. Violet was only able to visit her children on weekends when she had a travel pass from her residential facility.

Rose

Rose was a tall African American that was causally dressed. During her interview, she was pleasant, easy to engage with, and hospitable. Rose was well-spoken as she

discussed the special characteristics of each of her three children. During our interview, she showed me her refrigerator in her kitchen, which displayed a variety of items, including school-related materials, artwork, and a photograph of her youngest daughter.

Rose had been incarcerated for 2 years and 7 months, and at the time of her interview, she had been released for 7 months, following three previous incarcerations with sentences of 14 months, 2 years, and 16 months. Rose stated that she had attended school through the 9th grade. According to Rose, her income came from social security disability payments.

Rose had been divorced for 10 years, after being married for the same amount of time. At the time, she and her three minor children (ages 5, 7, and 10) were residing in a small apartment in Las Vegas' downtown area. According to Rose, one of her children had attention deficit with hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and another child was diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD).

Iris

Iris is an African American woman with a slender build. She described herself to be 5'10" tall. Dressed in summer attire on that very hot summer day, Iris joined our meeting on time. Relatively easy to engage, Iris was pleasant and congenial. At the time of the interview, Iris had been released for seven months following an incarceration that had lasted for three years and had also experienced a previous incarceration that lasted for two years. She was currently residing in a transitional facility, which provided reentry services to assist her in securing housing and employment.

The mother of five children, Iris only had one minor child – a 9-year-old daughter. Iris had been married for two years, but after being sentenced to prison her husband filed for divorce and was awarded custody of their daughter.

Iris discussed the importance of education. Having received her GED, Iris was currently pursuing a degree in Christian counseling. During her incarceration, Iris accumulated numerous training certificates, which she sent home to alert her children about her accomplishments. At the time, Iris had no job or any source of income.

Lavender

Lavender joined our interview neatly dressed in business-casual attire that included a navy-blue vest. She was an articulate, polite, business-minded African American woman. Throughout the interview, Lavender was candid, open, and easy to engage.

At the time of the interview, Lavender was living at her biological parents' home with her two children: an 11-year-old daughter and a 13-year-old son. She had been out of prison for two months. Sentenced to two years, Lavender was released after a year and a half, thanks to her participation in a work-release program. During her incarceration, her parents had cared for her children. Lavender also had experienced another incarceration in prison for three years.

Lavender graduated from high school and had completed some college courses but was not sure of how many credit hours she had achieved. She expressed interest in childhood development but was not currently seeking a degree. As part of her work release program, Lavender worked at McDonald's. Lavender explained that she did not

seek employment there following her return home, since she hated that job and had only worked there because it would help her achieve her goal of early release. Lavender was actively seeking employment opportunities that would provide her with the opportunity for future upward mobility.

Lavender exhibited a motivated personality type that propelled her to go the extra mile. She had read extensive literature on the topics of parenting and child development. She mentioned having breastfed her oldest child for two years and discussed the struggle she experienced with postpartum depression. (Her challenge with accessing treatment is highlighted in the *Findings* section of this study.)

Carnation

A well-dressed African American woman, Carnation was polite and soft spoken during the interview. She was easy to engage and concise during our conversation. Carnation had been released for one year, following a five-year incarceration. Carnation also had two previous incarcerations with sentences of 18 months and two years. At the time of the interview, Carnation was living with her mother, who had been the children's caregiver during her incarceration. She had completed her GED but was currently unemployed with limited means and no source of income. While her plans for future employment were not discussed, Carnation did express her desire to continue her education.

Carnation had four children, and her minor-aged children were 6, 7, and 9 at the time. (The age of the fourth child was not disclosed.) Two of her minor children and her older son were living at home with Carnation and her mother. According to Carnation,

she and her mother shared parenting responsibilities. Carnation attested that she and her children had a positive relationship with her mother, and she expressed confidence that her children were cared for while they were being looked after by her mother, during the time periods that she was incarcerated in prison.

Primrose

Tall and slender, with visible wrist and arm tattoos and casual dress, Primrose is an African American woman who looks young for her age. Primrose seemed interested in the interview. She was easy to engage, and she listened carefully before responding.

Incarcerated for one year and two months, Primrose had been released from prison for 11 months before the interview. Primrose also had a previous five year prison incarceration. At the time, she was living alone with her children in an apartment. Primrose discussed getting her GED but did not disclose how far she went in school. Her only source of income was $2,200 per month in child support, which she reportedly continued to receive during her incarceration.

Primrose's five children (ages 2, 4, 6, 13, and 16) experienced caregiver instability while their mother was incarcerated. Initially, Primrose's step-sister cared for the children. However, after alleged misuse of funding, wherein Primrose claimed that her step-sister used the funds for herself, rather than spending the money on the children, Primrose changed caregivers. She asked her biological mother to care for her children, despite their strained relationship.

Marigold

Of African American and mixed-race heritage, Marigold joined our interview in leisurely sports attire. Marigold was easy to engage and polite throughout the interview. Marigold reported that she had been incarcerated for three years and one month and had been released for a year and three months at the time of the interview and had one previous 18-month prison incarceration. Marigold earned a GED and completed some college classes. Although she was currently attending courses at a junior college, she was not enrolled in a degree-seeking program. She planned to continue taking classes and to begin seeking employment.

Marigold had two children – a 5-year-old son and a 7-year-old son. She, her same-sex partner, and her 7-year-old son were living together in an apartment. Since her incarceration, her younger son had been living with his biological father. When she was sentenced, Marigold and her husband agreed on this arrangement. During her incarceration, they divorced. Marigold stated that she was committed to rebuilding her relationships with her children. Spending time together as a family was important to Marigold, and she cherished being able to spend weekends with her younger son. According to Marigold, her partner was extremely helpful and supportive, and they had been in a stable relationship for two years.

Orchid

A young African American woman of average build, Orchid dressed in comfortable leisure wear for the interview. She reported that she had worked late the

night before – getting off in the early morning hours. Although she seemed visibly tired, Orchid remained alert and engaged during the interview.

At the time of the interview, Orchid had been released from prison for one month and seven days, after being incarcerated for one year and ten months, and a previous 8-month incarceration. She and her fiancé were residing in an apartment with their 3-year-old son. Orchid claimed to have a good relationship with her fiancé, and she indicated that he cared for their son while she was incarcerated. Orchid also reported that they had a successful co-parenting relationship.

Orchid had completed her first year in college. She was currently working in a factory. Since the job was fairly new, Orchid was not entirely sure of her exact income, but she estimated it to be about $1,200 per month.

Jasmine

An African American woman of average build, Jasmine joined the interview wearing casual summer clothing. She was polite and was easy to engage and communicate with. She wavers also interested in taking part in other research projects at UNLV.

Incarcerated for one year, at the time of the interview Jasmine had been out of prison for one and a half months. Jasmine had been incarcerated on two previous instances, for one year each occasion. Jasmine was currently unemployed with no source of income. She had earned a GED but did not indicate the last grade she completed in school.

Jasmine is the parent of a 14-year-old daughter. She reported that her sister-in-law had legal custody of her daughter. Since she and her sister-in-law had a troubled relationship, Jasmine was not currently able to visit her daughter. Despite the challenges, Jasmine was eager to reestablish a relationship with her daughter.

Daffodil

Soft-spoken and petite, Daffodil is an African American woman with a pleasant demeanor. Casually dressed, Daffodil joined our interview on time for the interview. There was a notable degree of depth in her responses to the interview questions. For example, Daffodil volunteered that she was a lesbian, even though I did not inquire about her sexual orientation.

At the time of the interview, Daffodil had been released for five months, following a one-year incarceration, and one other 18-month prison incarceration, two years before. Daffodil was living in a recovery home and had not yet been reunited with her children. Despite being in a recovery program, Daffodil did not express any future goals for obtaining employment. Daffodil stated that she had completed school through the 10th grade. Aside from enrollment in the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) food assistance program, Daffodil lacked any source of cash income.

Daffodil is the mother of eight children, including three who are still minors (ages 7, 14, and 16). Her 14- and 16-year-old daughters were adopted by a family member, but Daffodil's relationship with their caregiver was estranged, and Daffodil was restricted from visiting her younger girls. However, Daffodil indicated that these daughters had initiated contact with her on their own. One of Daffodil's older daughters was the kin

caregiver for her 7-year-old son, and since their relationship was intact, Daffodil was able to spend quality time with that child.

Instrumentation

For the purpose of the interviews, I designed the question set as a semi-structured guide. My primary research question, along with a review of the literature, determined the interview questions. Knowing that participants were used to lines of inquiry addressing their family demographics, criminal histories, and incarcerations, I deliberately created questions that would encourage participants to provide detailed responses. I served as the primary instrument, adjusting questions based on the participants' capacity to ponder, reflect, and respond (Canada, 2011; Yin, 2013).

Participants were afforded the freedom to decide what and how much they were comfortable sharing. By permitting this level of participant control, I empowered the women with freedom of choice (Gove, Volk, Still, Huang, & Thomas-Alexander, 2011). I desired to create a relaxed and conversational atmosphere for the interview, allowing each woman to take her time and share her story in her own way. This neutralized the possibility of bias and minimized any feelings of shame or stigma (Abma & Stake, 2014; Yin, 2013). Since I had no idea of what participants would be willing to share, the women were empowered to guide the interview process (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013).

All finalized questions were approved by the Walden's Institutional Review Board and my committee. Due to concerns regarding the participants' language and comprehension levels – particularly those without high-school educations – I discussed the questions with colleagues in the field of counseling to make certain that they were

easy to comprehend and that they facilitated the opportunity to closely investigate the women's responses by encouraging deep introspection.

Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The process began with a review of the informed consent document. I asked permission to audiotape each session, and I also asked if I could call them with follow-up questions if needed. Finally, I inquired if they would be willing to take photographs of events in their daily lives using a disposable camera, but only one participant agreed to participate in this exercise.

After securing each participant's permission, I audio-recorded the interviews, which were transcribed at a later date. During the interviews, I also recorded handwritten notes, which I used during the analysis process to confirm my findings. For clarification purposes, and in keeping with the protocol of the interview, I occasionally rephrased questions. This strategy afforded me the opportunity to obtain additional – anecdotal and nostalgic – commentary from the participants.

Study Location/Research Setting

I conducted all of the interviews for this study via telecommunications applications, which include FaceTime and Google Duo. I requested that all participants, use a quiet and private location, and to wear headphones or a wireless listening device, such as a Bluetooth for audio privacy. I set up for interviews in my private office. There appeared to be a high level of privacy for all of the interviews, and only one interview was interrupted.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted with all 12 participants, over a three-week period. To arrange interview dates and times, I had participants call my cell phone. After consent forms were reviewed and consent was confirmed, I conducted participant interviews that ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and was conducted using video communications platforms (either Zoom or FaceTime). Interviews were recorded on audio recording device and handwritten notes were utilized to record the participant responses, appearances, and noteworthy actions. After the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, for tracking purposes and thematic identification, I placed the content in NVivo. I utilized affinity coding to develop themes, and after reading the transcriptions, I prepared an excel spreadsheet to record pertinent statements. Although interviews were my main data source, I also examined other types of data, including any letters or photos that the women shared during the interview. My memos and field notes were invaluable aides for chronicling the documents provided by the participants.

Theoretical Saturation

Theoretical saturation is the point wherein findings become redundant. In this study, I achieved saturation when the data I gathered reached the point of diminishing returns; this occurred when there was nothing new which could be added to the identified themes in the women's narratives. I confirmed the saturation point by examining the quality of the responses to my research questions and by identifying how often the

themes repeated themselves. The NVivo software program (QSR International, 2015)

analyzed narrative data to ensure that new themes were not appearing from the data.

As noted by Hennick, Hutter and Bailey (2011), theoretical saturation exists when

the context and variation of the participants' experiences have been fully captured and the

data collected by researchers becomes redundant. For this reason, I constantly inspected

the NVivo hermeneutic unit to evaluate theme frequencies, determine how deeply themes

repeated themselves, and compare any association between themes.

Member Checking

In order to clarify my interpretations of the data, I utilized a member check. The

member check selection process was based on choosing individuals who wanted to

participate and were able to participate. Following the realization that some of the women

became unreachable due to transiency, I asked for alternative telephone numbers in order

to increase participation during the member check period. Many attempts were needed in

order to organize the member sessions. One participant had a scheduling conflict due to a

sick relative, one of the women had moved away from the region, and another woman

missed both the member check and her appointment which had been scheduled one week

earlier.

Video telecommunications applications, such as Duo or FaceTime were used to

conduct member checking. The member check process transpired smoothly, and there

were no interruptions. The member check participants confirmed my interpretations of

the data derived from the themes of their maternal identity, their desires for their children,

and the transition back to their parental role. The participants also verified my

interpretations concerning their transition back to the process of parenting, particularly that it takes time for them and their children to readjust following their separation due to incarceration, the necessity of accepting their children's feelings concerning their separation, and finally their acknowledgement of the importance of having adequate support and resources.

Data Preparation

My first step in data preparation was verbatim transcription of the interviews. I later removed all identifying information from each transcribed interview to de-identified the data (names, locations, and any specific information that could potentially reveal the identity of each participant). After the audio-tape transcription, I uploaded the data into the NVivo software to create a hermeneutic unit (QSR International, 2015; Friese, 2012) for the entire research project.

Code Development

I re-read the transcripts in order to completely immerse myself in the content with the goal of clarifying themes and identifying any similarities or differences in the participant narratives and in theories derived from the literature. Following the process of inductive analysis, I cleaned and organized the raw data to ensure it matched my chosen coding format. I continued to re-read the text until I became confident with the details of the content. Next, I assembled the data into repeating chunks based on descriptive and interpretive coding. After examining overlapping coding, I un-coded text to ensure that a solid fit existed with the research questions overall. I continually revised and refined the category system by coding and re-coding the data to match the list of categories,

developing subcategories when needed. Core categories were pivotal in constructing the theoretical narrative from the data as the relationships became evident. The above-mentioned steps were critical for identifying the range of issues presented in the data and any leads that facilitated the understanding of the participant narratives in the raw data.

In the transcripts, I used NVivo software to analyze and code the narrative data. NVivo permitted me to single out specific properties in the coded data. In one instance, I identified associations in a number of codes that I could condense into a single code to create a higher-order code – in this case, a parenting transition. From there, I refined the parenting transition category to create sub-themes within the code, which fully captured participant experiences that directly related to their descriptions of the transition back to their parental role.

The NVivo software allowed me to run multiple analyses to identify if the established themes were present in all the transcripts. The code manager and network functions in NVivo allowed me to review the coded segments of data in order to recognize any associations between one code and another. I further reviewed all of the initial codes that indicated a high level of frequency to evaluate if these pieces of data were indeed meaningful to the participant's narrative. I examined the frequency level of codes and transcripts to discern the prominence of each code by examining the intensity level of each participant response and by using a groundedness score of 20 or above (a NVivo term that identifies how frequently the code appears in the transcripts).

I created inductive codes in the data by utilizing the range of issues raised by participants. I began by identifying at least one third of the themes based on the data.

Using code development, I further reduced the data to comply with the iterative process. I continually monitored the themes to detect when a point of saturation occurred – the point wherein no new data was available to be revealed.

To create a deductive coding structure, I analyzed the codes in relation to the established research questions. I selected deductive codes based on the questions in the interview guide and questions from the literature review. Deductive code examples from the literature and interview protocol included African American women's experiences, maternal identity, resumption of parenting, and co-parenting. The query tool in NVivo allowed me to verify that the codes aligned with the research questions.

The final step in coding was the development of overarching categories for the themes derived from my assumptions and the creation of an interpretive model or framework derived from these interpretations. For the analysis of the themes, I evaluated various aspects of the literature review and the conceptual framework, which are presented in the *Findings* section. I also incorporated direct quotes from the participants to relay their experiences and emphasize deeper meaning.

Hennick et al. (2011) said coding is a process wherein one-third of the data is used to develop codes; however, in order to create common classifications, I coded as a comparative and iterative process. In developing my codes, I deliberatively read more than the recommended one-third. I began by reading six transcripts to develop the initial codes and added new codes when the theme seemed to have significant meaning for the participant. Hennick et al. recommended adding more codes later in the project in the case that adequate codes were not initially captured the researcher. My code list was

further refined and strengthened when I reviewed my field notes, recorded memos, and examined associations and networks between emerging themes. I analyzed the meanings and the properties of all codes to refine the subcategories. Finally, codes and categories were compared, contrasted, and sorted until saturation was achieved.

To summarize, the process of inductive analysis demands constant and systematic comparison. This process of inductive analysis requires the examination of emergent themes derived from interview data. These themes must be reexamined and checked for accuracy. The data must fit into new categories or thematic constructions. Finally, the theory must be developed or extended based on rigorous data analysis.

Creating a Codebook

I created a codebook as themes emerged in order to list all pertinent code labels and to supply definitions for themes that were identified as codes. Throughout the data-analysis process, as an iterative activity, I continued to refine the codes. NVivo enabled me to organize the codes using its Code Manager function. This allowed me to create definitions for the codes as they were being developed and refined.

Evaluating Quality of Codes

During the development process, by identifying the point of saturation and the appropriateness of strategies (interviews, transcriptions, and consistency in coding), I was able to confidently evaluate the quality of the codes. I reviewed the research question to confirm that all the questions had been thoroughly addressed, and I checked the transcripts to ensure that no new themes had appeared, which needed to be taken into consideration. NVivo software facilitated the development of thematic relationships and

connecting structures. The analysis of the data uncovered emergent and recurring themes, which were rigorously and consistently compared throughout the study, and ultimately compared with my theoretical framework.

Checking for Transparency and Interpretive Validity

The trustworthiness of their research is critical for qualitative researchers. I therefore provided meticulous descriptions of my code development and data preparation to display the transparency of my methodology. Similarly, my commitment to interpretive validity (member check) assured the authenticity and trustworthiness of the data I presented. By taking my participants' opinions into account during the course of the study via member checks, I added to the trustworthiness of the study. In addition, member checks served as an effective means to circumvent potential researcher bias and established the demarcation of the authority shift—from researcher assuming the position as the consummate expert to a situation of shared authority. My member check sessions helped me check for credibility and the accuracy of the interpretation. At the time of the interview, I inquired if participants were willing to participate in the member check process and every participant agreed to engage in member checking.

In order to check the researcher's interpretation, the questions concerning several thematic categories were asked in an informal manner. During the session, I took hand-written notes of the participants' responses. The participants spoke freely. The women displayed a sense of comfort and rather than addressing the issues from an individualistic perspective, the items were discussed from a more universal perspective.

At the end of each interview, I composed reflexive field notes to ensure I had captured all of the observations I had made in the field. These field notes provided consistency in the analytic process and became a thorough record of my observations relating to the environment of the interview setting. Recurring themes emerged when I reflected on the field notes. The interviews were generally held early in the day, and the women appeared nicely dressed in business-casual attire. They were prompt, very polite, relatively easy to engage, and remained focused throughout the session. The women seemed to take the process seriously, and they appeared genuinely happy to share their experiences. Furthermore, almost all of the participants thanked me for the interview and shared that their participation helped provide them with the skills to help other formerly incarcerated women who could benefit from listening to their stories.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) established the concept of the transferability of findings. In qualitative research, transferability means that findings should apply to other similar contexts or settings, wherein a different researcher is able to apply the findings to their settings, times, situations, and participants. As such, researchers strive to promote transferability by ensuring that the context of their fieldwork site is adequately explained. Lincoln and Guba (1985) further attest that transferability can be attained when a deep description of the research phenomenon is provided. To this end, I deliberately removed thick descriptions from the narratives captured during the semi-structured interviews I conducted with the formerly incarcerated women in my study. In Chapter 5, excerpts from formerly incarcerated women describe their experiences in attempting to reclaim their parental role, reform their maternal identity, and achieve a degree of harmony with

their child(ren)'s caregiver. Although my sample may not be applicable to a larger population of formerly incarcerated African American women due to its small size, it provides a context to experiences that these women lived through.

The creation of an audit trail is one means of showing dependability. By documenting every step in the process of data collection and analysis, my audit trails provided transparency. I depended on self-reflective memo writing in order to document progress throughout the writing process and to demonstrate the credibility of my research findings. The code book I created also provided methodological rigor in the research process by helping to establish the dependability of the analytic process of data analysis and assign definitions of the identified themes.

Based on qualitative methods, there was a direct link between the data and the findings in this study, which served to validate confirmability. My findings methodically and systematically linked back to the data. My ample use of direct quotes in chapters four and five further corroborated the interpretation of the narrative data.

I additionally used methodological logs as an internal process to record reflective insights, which was consistent with O'Brien's procedure of recording personal reflections. Through the use of memos, theoretical questions, and field notes, I recorded my interpretive hunches in NVivo in order to provide a trail for auditability. This technique allowed me to systematically revisit what I had previously recorded, which may have provoked an interpretation that could be later reexamined by using the previously recorded reflection. This allowed me to better comprehend how the

interpretation evolved, thus establishing a means to check the data for accuracy, which enhanced the study's trustworthiness.

I took several steps to ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of this study. It was framed to encourage participants to freely address the research questions. Thick descriptions were captured using the semi-structured interview guide, which was deliberately designed to minimize the response fatigue that can occur when too many questions are involved. Rather, the use of probes allowed me to gain greater insight from responses which could have been misconstrued at the surface level.

Use of the emic (or insider's position) of the Black feminist epistemological lens for the study's design proved to be another helpful tool that enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings. It allowed me to quickly engage with the participants and implied a level of trust and rapport building. My experience as a human services professional, combined with my status as an African American mother, gave me further credibility in this endeavor.

Summary

In this chapter, the participant demographics, interview processes, and participant interviews were described. Through examination of the responses and statements that were made during the interviews by the participants, I recorded their perceptions of how their maternal identities and relationships were impacted by their instances of incarceration, and the behaviors and lifestyle choices that influenced it. The participants explained how being incarcerated still influenced feelings of shame and guilt for them, and at time, inadequacy relative to their maternal identity.

Using the lenses of the critical criminology theory and Black feminism, I determined that the responses of the participants appeared to be consistent with the findings from alternative studies that were outlined in the literature review. By challenging contemporary comprehension that maternal incarceration is societally damaging, the fundamental principles of critical criminology and Black feminism assisted with reevaluating the impact of repeat incarcerations. Research has demonstrated the crippling effects of incarceration on the African American family. In Chapter 5, I explain findings and expand on their significance and implications related to positive social change.

Chapter 5: Findings

Introduction

This study was conducted to explore how instances of repeat incarceration affect African American women's ability to negotiate their maternal identity and implement measures that are supportive of maternal maintenance during and after incarceration. The participant sample for this study consisted of 12 mothers who were representative of the general population of African American women who experienced incarceration. Participants were between 30 and 50 years of age, and they all had minor children ranging from 2 months to 17 years. Nine participants attended school through the 9th grade or achieved their G.E.D., and three participants completed some college courses. Only one participant was actively employed, and the other participants secured financial support from diverse sources. Two participants were married, six were divorced and currently single, and four had never been married. During participants' incarceration, grandparents served as caregivers for the children in six cases, biological fathers took over custody in three cases, and in four instances, other family members cared for children. In one situation, a change in caregivers occurred, resulting in a total caregiver count of 13 rather than 12. Following incarceration, eight women attempted to establish coparenting relationships with their children's caregivers, but only four of these post release coparenting arrangements proved to be successful. Participants in this study consisted of two women from the Las Vegas Legal HOPE for Prisoners (CLAIM), three women from Las Vegas Parole and Probation, and seven women from Lutheran Social Services (LSS). Eight participants in this study served under 3 years in prison, three of

the women spent 3 years in prison, and one participant was incarcerated for 5 years. Two

of the women in the study endured multiple incarcerations. At the time of interviews,

participants' length time since release from prison varied from 1 month to 3 years.

Results and Thematic Findings

This section includes findings of the study as well as six analytical themes that

represent women's post-incarceration experiences related to resumption of parenting:

history of abuse and loss, caregiver trust, parenting transition, post-release coparenting,

maternal identity, and support.

I employed the strategies of thematic analysis and constant comparison. I began

these processes by reading each transcript to establish content, and later reread each

transcript in NVivo in order to conduct initial line-by-line coding. Preliminary codes

were assigned to prominent themes. Codes were further refined based on examinations of

identified differences and commonalities. Themes were reconfirmed following an

analysis of codes for groundedness and intensity. The process of constant and systematic

comparison enabled further refinement of the coding system and elimination of

preliminary codes that did not represent at least four of the study participants.

Constant comparison of interviews enabled the creation of a grid to determine

salience of themes within each interview as well as themes shared between multiple

participants. I was able to further refine codes by defining, identifying networks and

connections, and later renaming them. Groundedness was the determining factor to

establish the significance of each given theme across different interviews.

Groundedness is strategically important in terms of assisting me to determine the frequency of specific data for each emergent theme. Thus, for the purpose of this analysis, I elected to analyze themes for groundedness in order to evaluate the extent to which themes were displayed across all interviews. To better enhance the grounding of each theme, I selected themes that were relevant to research questions and were represented by least four of the 12 participants.

History of Abuse and Loss

The theme of history of abuse and loss was addressed by women in this study concerning any abuse they experienced prior to their incarceration. This theme's groundedness score was 29 and included quotes from six of the 12 women. Despite not being addressed this theme is relevant in terms of many participants' past experiences. Several subthemes emerged from this larger theme, including intimate partner violence, sexual abuse, and loss. Intimate partner violence and sexual abuse are often referred to as gendered violence. Sexual abuse was a salient subtheme for Violet and Jasmine, while loss was a prominent issue for Daisy, Iris, and Daffodil. Overall, loss is a subtheme that affected five of the 12 women in this study.

Violet suffered sexual abuse as a minor and experienced intimate partner violence when she was an adult. She recounted the sexual abuse that both she and her sister experienced from their mother's boyfriend when they were teenagers. Violet described her disappointment when her mother refused to stop seeing their abuser. Violet said:

She didn't do anything when I told her…nothing happened at all and it happened

a lot. She stayed with him and I used to see this man going to get my mom and I

have brothers by him. At that time, I really needed someone to know why I was so

mean to him and why I felt the way that I felt about him. I wasn't being

manipulative or you know, just mean for nothing. It was their choice not to deal

with him.

As a teenager, Violet wanted justice, and as an adult, she struggled to come to

terms with why her mother refused to stop seeing the man that was sexually assaulting

her daughters. Violet failed to indicate whether she or her family ever reported the abuse

in order to seek counseling or press charges against the alleged perpetrator. According to

Violet, her family's coping approach was insular, with each family member having an

individual response to reports of assault. Violet stated that as adults, her half-brothers

declined to have any relationship with their father, which indicates their feelings toward

the man who perpetrated abuse on their sisters.

When questioned about her parenting experiences, Violet said:

I was real young when I got married; I was only 22 years old. When my husband

and I met, I had two babies already and was pregnant with a third. My babies

father passed away- my two oldest babies. I was so blessed to move into a really

nice apartment in North Las Vegas and I was paying $42.00 [monthly]. My

apartment was a section 8 apartment that I had moved into in Vegas Heights area,

and… this man, on a daily[basis]- we took time to know one another… got to

know each other…[and] ended up hooking up and being together… I was real

vulnerable and lonely because of losing my kids father.

Violet further elaborated on the abuse she experienced during her marriage:

After a while, I got sick and tired of getting beat… our marriage became very dangerous and weapons and stuff were being used or I wasn't allowed to go anywhere or be seen. I kept going to school and many days I want with two black eyes because I was so determined to become a CNA and I did with two black eyes…

In discussing her physical abuse at the hands of her ex-husband, Violet said:

That last time that I took him to rehab, on this specific day, he had left his drugs on a saucer that was in my bedroom… I took him to rehab. When I get back, I picked it up to use it and that how my drug problem got started for me. In my mind, it wasn't gonna be nothing big and I would be in control of it, but it ended up controlling me because I really liked it. At the beginning, I figured it would be something that I would do for recreation from time to time… In my mind, this is what I kept thinking- it's just from time to time-for recreation. I'm not hooked… I continue to take care of my babies and house, but one day I realized that I was going to buy it… even sneaking away to go buy it.

Violet acknowledged the lasting effect that the trauma she experienced in early childhood had on her. She expressed feelings of confusion and disappointment she experienced from her mother's refusal to protect her from repeated sexual abuse. Violet realized how her childhood trauma served as a potential precursor to the drug abuse that eventually led to her arrest and incarceration.

Similar to Violet, Jasmine's unresolved experiences of sexual abuse affected her future relationships and her perceptions of motherhood. However, unlike Violet or any of

the other participants in the study, Jasmine experienced trauma as an adult when her two young daughters were sexually abused and placed into the child welfare system as a result of the abuse. It is thus critically important to properly contextualize Jasmine's complex experiences regarding the loss of her children to the child welfare system and the corresponding role it played on her own mental health and on her identity as a mother.

Following an investigation of the alleged child sexual abuse, the Clark County Department of Family Services took Jasmine's daughters into protective custody. The girls were later placed in a formal foster care arrangement with their paternal aunt. Subsequently, Jasmine was diagnosed with bipolar depression, which she contends is related to losing custody of her children. According to Jasmine, the tragic events involving her daughters' molestation, which she refused to elaborate on or discuss in detail, and the termination of her parental rights brought about a nervous breakdown:

> I really had an actual nervous breakdown after that happened to my daughter, cause I felt like I failed as a mother and that's why my children ended up being taken by CPS. (Jasmine)

Jasmine described early abuse in a marriage that was forced upon her:

> I was in a marriage where I was abused… I was real young— I married him at the age of sixteen and I didn't really want to, but it was something kind of like an arranged or forced marriage—I got pregnant and he was older; he was 20 years old and my mother told him that he was going to have to marry me or she was going to make sure that he went to jail for statutory rape. (Jasmine)

Having little agency over her own affairs in her adolescent life, Jasmine was victimized first by her mother pressuring her to marry and later by her husband's acts of intimate partner violence.

Daisy experienced many significant losses at a young age. Given up for adoption, Daisy mourned the loss of her biological mother. After her twin brother was killed, Daisy's adoptive mother passed away, as did her father and her brother on her father's side. Throughout the interview, Daisy explained in detail the effect that each loss had on her mental and emotional state:

> My brother- he's my real brother, but also, he is my daddy's son— he's my older brother. Back then, he was living with my auntie and she died— went into a coma— diabetes. You know, everyone I was close to— Exactly like my baby—I cannot be angry with her when she gets mad or reacts to about things. Everyone that she loves and gets close to leaves. (Daisy)

The personal losses that Daisy experienced resulted in acute anxiety about leaving her home. Beginning in adolescence and continuing into adulthood, Daisy feared that if she left home another loved one would die:

> This is a person who took me in… who adopted me. This person is my daddy. He passed away… He left and I was just a baby—12 years old and I said that I refused to go back and forth. I told myself that if I decide to leave the house, someone else might be gone when I come back. I know that I had real messed up thinking, but this is how I was thinking because I had seen it happen before. In my mind, I saw me deciding to leave and my mom died. (Daisy)

Throughout the interview, Daisy consistently acknowledged the intensity of her familial losses. Her sister's health issues were significant enough for Daisy to categorize with the other losses she experienced. Within this context, Daisy expressed empathy for her own children, because of the loss they had experienced due to her incarceration.

Relational changes experienced by incarcerated women can take multiple forms. While many women in the study did not identify any relational losses, for Iris the loss of her marriage was a traumatic experience:

> Once I went to prison, he didn't want to be married to me anymore, so things changed real quick for us. (Iris)

Regarding the sub-theme of intimate partner violence, Iris reflected on how traumatic events affected her family:

> They definitely have seen fighting and violence. I recently talked with my oldest child—my son because he has seen a lot of violence in the home. (Iris)

Although Iris did not describe the specifics of the intimate partner violence she experienced, this sub-theme was as relevant for her as it was for the other women in the study.

For Daffodil, in addition to the loss of her father, she relayed a sense of profound loss because she was not raised by her biological mother:

> I always told myself that I would never take my children through the same damage that I went through as a child… My biological parents didn't raise me. (Daffodil)

Daffodil elaborated on the situation concerning her mother's lack of care:

When I was growing up, my mother was real sick a lot. My family tells me that

she couldn't even walk after she had me, so they had to take care of me. What's

so confusing is that my mother took care of four other children that my father had

with some other woman… Why would she raise 11 children, but she did not raise

me? I never understood that… I still don't and there is nothing she can ever say to

make me get that! (Daffodil)

Even as an adult, Daffodil's sense of loss was quite intense, and she still had

difficulty rationalizing why her biological mother raised so many other children but could

not raise her. Daffodil addressed her attempt to come to terms with her feelings. She

acknowledged that she only had one mother and stated, "I don't want to still be holding

resentment and lose my mother."

None of the women in this study discussed attempts to seek counseling or access

services prior to their incarceration. Although the narratives represented in this theme

displayed common experiences relating to abuse and loss, each woman's trauma was

unique as was their method of coping with adversity and vulnerability in their life events.

A vulnerability shared by each woman in the study involved the decision concerning who

would be the caregiver for their child(ren) while they were incarcerated. The decision

concerning caregiving is an a priori category/theme in this study, and the participant

narratives recorded in the ensuing section were based on the question from the semi-

structured interview: How did you decide who would care for your child(ren) while you

were incarcerated?

Caregiver Trust

The theme of "caregiver trust" addresses the reasoning of soon-to-be incarcerated women in deciding who should care for their child(ren) during their term of incarceration. Analysis of the data relating to this theme confirmed a significant level of groundedness with a score of 50 across all 12 interviews. All 12 participants explained how they selected their child(ren)'s caregiver during their incarceration. Half of the 12 participants selected grandparents to serve as family caregivers (two paternal and four maternal). For three of the 12 participants, the decision was automatic since the child(ren)'s biological father was willing and available to serve as caregiver. Three of the 12 women chose an aunt as the caregiver, and in one case, the participant's adult daughter became her child's caregiver after her mother passed away. The majority of the women (nine out of 12) had an existing supportive relationship with the individual they selected to be their child(ren)'s caregiver, and they were confident that they chose the best available candidate. Ultimately, all of the women trusted their selected caregiver to provide quality care for the child(ren).

Like most women in the study, Carnation expressed confidence in her decision to have her mother serve as caregiver for her children during her incarceration:

I always knew that my mother was the best person to take care of my kids cause she always treats then just like I treat them. (Carnation)

Daffodil's choice of caregiver deviated from the other women. Given the strong relationship that her daughter already had with her son, she was confident in her daughter's ability to care for her brother:

My daughter—she is very responsible. She always has been and that is the reason

that I wanted my daughter to look out for her brother because I know that she will

make sure that he is good and treat him right. (Daffodil)

The desire for their children to reside with kin caregivers rather than being placed

in the foster care system heavily influenced the women in the study. For two of the

women, multiple family caregivers were needed over the course of their incarceration.

Daisy originally selected her mother to be the children's caregiver, and both Daisy and

mother arranged for Daisy's sister to take over if needed:

I slept good about it because I knew that my babies wouldn't be mistreated and it

would the same as if I was there, you know what I'm saying? It's even better for

me because she is my mother and she ain't ever turned her back on me. My sister

either, so I knew that if something were to happen to my mama, my sister jump in

and make sure that my kids were okay, so she [her sister] was my backup

guardian for everything for my kids. (Daisy)

The death of Daisy's mother resulted in her sister stepping in as the children's

caregiver until her release, and fortunately the transition between caregivers was

uneventful.

In Primrose's case, after discovering that her step-sister was not properly caring

for her children, she was forced to make a change:

My mom ended up getting temporary guardianship over my kids because my step-

sister was taking care of my kids, but I starting being told that she wasn't taking

good care of them. (Primrose)

Separation from their children is a heart-wrenching reality for women facing eminent incarceration, and the selection of caregiver is the most critical decision that women are forced to make in this situation.

As part of a cohabiting couple, selecting her son's father as caregiver was a natural selection for Orchid:

Oh, it wasn't even anything that I was going to discuss… It's not for my mother or grandmother or nobody to raise our child, so he was going to be with his father. (Orchid)

The biological fathers who were selected as caregivers had been in well-established relationships with the women prior to their incarceration, and in each case the women expressed confidence in the father's ability to properly care for their child.

Although Iris and her husband divorced shortly after her sentencing, Iris seemed comfortable with her ex-husband's decision to assume caregiving obligations. The choice was automatic - one of natural selection, rather than a process of elimination – and no questions were asked.

"Dad made the decision – that was it and that was all!" (Iris)

All of the participants desired caregivers who would provide nurturing environments and quality care. It was important to the women that their children were placed with relatives whom they had established a close relationship. It was important for the participants to select caregivers who were willing and able to facilitate contact between the mother and her children during the period of incarceration, as maintenance

of the parent/child relationship is critical for the mother's successful transition back to their parental role.

The narratives in the following section relate to parenting transition and represent an additional a priori category/theme.

Parenting Transition

The third theme, parenting transition, addresses the sensitive process of returning to the parental role following incarceration. It examines how the previously incarcerated women in this study attempted to resume their care-taking responsibilities and reassert their authoritative role over their child(ren). This theme emerged from participant statements concerning multiple aspects of parenting that appeared in 153 direct quotations emanating from questions concerning parenting transition and from a general question that encouraged the women to talk about their children.

The theme of parenting transition experienced representation in all of the interviews with individual levels of intensity. A solidly grounded code was realized in all participant interviews, and following further refinement of the code, I identified five sub-themes that clearly related to the major theme of parenting transition. These sub-themes were also well grounded, deriving from direct participant quotes from all 12 interviews. The data analysis process resulted in the identification of five identified sub-themes which were: (a) positive connection to their children, (b) preparation for resuming parenting, (c) maintaining contact, (d) relationship as a conduit, and (e) responsibilities.

a. Positive Connection to Their Children

The sub-theme of "positive connection to their children" was derived from direct participant quotes in response to the question taken from the interview guide: "tell me about your children." This deliberately broad question was selected as the starting point for the interviews in order to encourage participants to respond openly. Across all 12 of the interviews, a total of 94 quotes were associated with this deductive a priori sub-theme. A common element emerged in this theme when the participants' descriptions of their children served as indicators of the strong positive connections the women had with their children.

Of the 12 participants, nine used positive adjectives when describing their children, such as beautiful, smart, happy, sweet, energetic, and unique. Two of the mothers discussed what types of food their children liked. Many of the women elaborated on which activities their children enjoyed, including singing, playing with toys, karate, attending church, and going to school.

Dahlia positively described her well-bonded family life that deteriorated when she was overtaken by drug use:

I got so overwhelmed with trying to deal with and balance everything, but it was because of my addiction. I knew everything about my kids… what they were allergic to, what foods they liked and don't like, you know. I was that kind of mother. (Dahlia)

Rose provided much detail when discussing her children. She seemed to be a very involved mother who was able to distinctly appraise each of her children's personalities.

Rose described their behaviors as actions, rather than inherent characteristics of their

identity:

> My daughter is so beautiful and she is 10. She does have some problems with
>
> behavior due to me using drugs… She is now on medication for bipolar disorder
>
> and ADD and she needs that because she gets really out of control at times.
>
> (Rose)

While acknowledging her daughter's mental health challenges, Rose was also

able to describe her in a positive manner:

> My other daughter is seven and she is also very smart. She makes the honor roll at
>
> school every semester. She does have OCD and she plays with things like
>
> shoelaces and thread all of the time. It's like she is obsessed with them and she
>
> will unravel her clothing to get to the thread. It's like she thinks that her thread is
>
> a person. (Rose)

> Before our interview was completed, Rose answered a telephone call from

her children's doctor, wherein she provided a detailed account about each individual

child in my presence. Rose noted that one of the children has behavior problems and

another has trouble sleeping. During this telephone discussion, Rose demonstrated active

parenting and genuine involvement in her children's lives. I was impressed with Rose's

effortless account of the details of her daughter's life that week: diet, behavioral

descriptions, sleep patterns, along with her execution of her parental role and her

competency. Rose had independently sought help for her daughter's mental health

concerns, and she consistently described each girl in a very positive way.

b. Preparation for Resuming Parenting

The sub-theme of "preparation for resuming parenting" is a critical part of the transition to parenting following incarceration. In reference to this study, "prepare" refers to the anticipation and planning of a course of action to resume parenting; it also implies that a process is involved. This sub-theme was represented in all 12 participant interviews and yielded 50 quotations. The selected participant responses were chosen on the level of articulation concerning how each woman prepared herself to effectively parent following the separation from her children.

Parenting classes can be instrumental in providing mothers with the skills they will need when resuming their parental roles. Five of the 12 participants found parenting classes to be helpful. Four of the women participated in parenting and other types of self-help classes during their incarceration and afterwards. The fifth woman indicated a desire to take future classes.

Interview statements from Violet, Carnation, Marigold, and Daffodil illustrate the commonality of benefits experienced from taking parenting classes. Violet discussed how parenting classes and her philosophy toward discipline helped her return to her parental role:

> I took classes on parenting, and I was always good at being a parent. I never had to beat my kids or lay hands on them. We could always talk and I could talk to them about things. (Violet)

Daffodil realized the need to take parenting classes in order to gain tools and strategies to combat any future problems that may arise:

Actually, I think that I might still need to be in parenting classes because I really missed so much. I suppose just needing help with doing the right things and how to deal with a situation on the right way, because there might be some resentment there that I do not know about. I really do want to know different ways that I can deal with stuff that comes up. (Daffodil)

Daffodil's comments displayed her desire to make up for the time she lost with her children and acknowledged her need to expand her parenting skills and develop a reservoir of disciplinary strategies. Daffodil also demonstrated concern that her children successfully process the events relating to her incarceration.

For Daisy and Primrose, their parenting class was simply another step on the road to retaking their parental responsibility:

Well, that's just being a mother. I gotta take care of my business and responsibilities now that I'm out of jail. That is not anyone else's job, but mine and it's just something that I have to do because I've got kids. I would have still been taking care of my kids if I would've not ended up getting locked up. (Daisy)

Both Daisy and Primrose described their return to parenting in automatic terms – as something that was their responsibility.

I can't say that anything prepared me for going home with my kids, cause it's not like it's something that you forget… you always know how to be a parent. You just go home and just continue what you know to do or what you were doing

before. I did have to get use to some things that my mother had been doing.

(Primrose)

Daffodil had different concerns involving her transition back to parenting, identifying the need to get to know each of her children individually. This was particularly important, because during her incarceration, Daffodil was not able to visit or converse with her children. Their only contact was through written letters:

Well really, I just wanted to know my kids as people… like individuals because

for me, it's so easy to look at them as a group, but all of my kids have really

different personalities and I learned that I have to deal with each one of them as

their own individual person, because they are not the same. (Daffodil)

Daisy understood that resuming her parental role would be a process, and she described the difficulties she experienced in the transition:

I see things that makes me see the gap between me and my kids and our

relationship. Like my daughter, she won't hear me when it comes to certain

things. I'll tell her to do something and she'll look at me like I'm crazy and keep

going like I said nothing. I'm always having my sister get her to do things because

my daughter listens to my sister. (Daisy)

Daisy acknowledged that a period of adjustment needed to occur before she could successfully reestablish her parental authority:

I care about how she feels about things. I came back into her life, after being gone

for so long, so I understood that I couldn't just jump back in like I never left. So,

I'm taking it slow and I compromise. I ask my sister about how things were

before I came home and tell her that I'm not trying to change anything, just get in where I fit in, you know what I mean? If I came in trying to change things, it would make things worse. (Daisy)

Daisy demonstrated a stronger intensity in the theme and a more sophisticated realization of the steps involved in the transition process. She realized the importance of approaching her parental role by being cognizant of her children's perceptions. Furthermore, she did not attempt to use her parental status to superficially impose her authority on her children (i.e., status on the basis of biological determination). Instead, Daisy exhibited patience by allowing her children the time needed to become readjusted to her authoritative parental role, stating, "Taking baby steps, I try to keep things going from where my mother left things."

Lavender's experience was notably different, as she was able to return to familiar surroundings when she transitioned back to parenting:

Well, the transition was pretty easy because they went right back to a place that they knew. They were at my parents home… same house and block that I grew up on…the same friends and the same people… it's all familiar. It was just that comfortable and familiar thing for me. I never had to get used to nothing new and neither did they. It made things easier nothing to come back to something brand new. (Lavender)

Since she resided with her children in her parents' home before her incarceration, and the children lived there in her absence, the transition went relatively smoothly. The maintenance of familiar surroundings eased the transition for all involved:

Yeah, so some people have to go through so much when they go home. They have to find somewhere to live and get used to a whole new life. I didn't have to do that. When I went home, everything just fell back into place, so it made it a lot easier. (Lavender)

As a sub-theme, the transition back to parenting illuminates the steps that the formerly incarcerated women undertook as they prepared their return to active parenting. The women's responses naturally emerged in several clusters such as taking parenting classes, viewing resumption of parenting as an automatic occurrence versus being a process, and regaining their parental authority versus taking a child-centered approach to reforming the family unit. Violet, Carnation, Marigold, and Daffodil found the parenting classes to be helpful, whereas Daisy and Primrose perceived their transition to parenting as an automatic situation which offered no choice but to dive in. The fact that five of the 12 women perceived the transition to parenting as a process was an unexpected result of the study. For Daffodil, Rose, and Daisy the transitional return to parenting was a process to reestablish their parental authority. However, for Carnation and Lavender, the transition was a process of adjusting to their children's needs (e.g., to be understood, for counseling, etc.). Three of the 12 participants (one-quarter of the sample) perceived parenting as their sole responsibility and as something that must be done. Their matter-of-fact attitude was stated pragmatically and was not intended as a disheartening situation.

Parental transitioning, while a common theme for all the women, exhibited some nuanced differences for two of the 12 participants. Lavender experienced a level of intensity in the theme regarding the ease and comfort associated with familiar

surroundings when transitioning back to parenting. Having lived in a stable community with her parents and children before being imprisoned, Lavender found that returning to her family home following incarceration eased the resumption of her parenting role. Daffodil's experience was vastly different. During her incarceration, she had no face-to-face or telephone contact with her children and was only able to communicate via letters. Upon her release, Daffodil described the process of getting reacquainted with her children as a nuanced component in her transition back to parenting.

The following section demonstrates how during their incarceration the women in this study sustained contact with their children.

c. Maintaining Contact

How the women maintained contact with their children while incarcerated comprises the sub-theme of "maintaining contact." Participant responses from all 12 interviews secured this topic's inclusion in this study. Of the 12 study participants, 11 maintained contact with their children during their incarceration via one or more of the following methods: face-to-face meetings, telephone conversations, letter writing, or a combination. Ten women confirmed telephone contact, eight women communicated by letters, seven enjoyed face-to-face contact, and Iris reported participation in a program that supported video visits and story book recordings. Daffodil only communicated with her children through written letters, and three of the other participants had no face-to-face visits and were only allowed telephone communication during their entire term of incarceration.

During Daisy's incarceration, her adoptive mother, with whom she had a close

relationship, became terminally ill, and she was unable to transport the children to the

prison, due to the significant distance from the area of Las Vegas where they resided:

> They never, ever tried to keep me separate from my kids. They always allowed to
>
> me make collect phone calls and they always accepted them. (Daisy)

Along with her mother's terminal illness, Daisy's adoptive sister developed uncontrolled

diabetes and began losing her vision. Given the situation, Daisy was appreciative of her

mother's willingness to pay for the collect calls from prison.

Despite an established child visitation program at her prison, Rose also had no

face-to-face contact with her children during her incarceration due to the strained

relationship she had with her child's caregiver:

> The mother program in prison tried to arrange visits with the kids, but the mother
>
> in law and aunt wouldn't have it and they never came to see me. I did get some
>
> free phone calls through children and family services program in the prison, but
>
> that was it. Maybe just a few. (Rose)

Although Rose attempted to stay in touch with her children by writing letters, she

had to rely on prison services for help with phone calls and letter writing, which resulted

in limitations in her contact with her children.

Violet enjoyed some visits and had regular telephone contact. However, she

credited letter writing to assure her children of her deep love for them and to affirm her

parental authority:

I wrote my kids constantly. I didn't wait for special events like Christmas, or

graduation, or their birthday. I pressed… I pressure called, wrote, and parented. I

told them always how I loved them so much. Having the chance to be a mother

while in prison made coming home so much easier for me and being a mother

when I came home so much easier. (Violet)

Violet's frequent letters and cards served to solidify her involvement in the

developmental milestones and every-day events in her children's lives.

Many other participants, who experienced regular visits with their children,

depended on community-based social service programs in order to maintain contact:

They would come out once a month with Lutheran Services or sometimes they

would ride out with my cousin who came to visit me while I was locked up.

(Primrose)

In addition to occasional family visits, Iris participated in a social service program

that utilized technology employing video and other media forms to help her maintain

contact with her children:

I did some video visits, and this organization would come out and they would

bring CD's so I could record myself reading books to my kids and they would

give it to you to send to your children. With that you could send cards and books

also so they could hear mommy reading and talking to them. (Iris)

Familial relationships generally suffer during incarceration, unless mothers are

permitted to maintain regular contact with their children. There can be many obstacles to

maintaining the parent/child connection, including caregiver willingness or ability. A

strained relationship with the caregiver or a caregiver with health problems often interferes with the visitation process. Conversely, when a good relationship exists between the parent and the caregiver visits occur regularly. Community-based programs exist to assist caregivers who lack the financial means but have a willingness to participate in parent-child prison visitation. Unfortunately, when a strained relationship exists between the mother and the caregiver, as was the case with Rose, the caregiver may choose not to utilize available community programs that help facilitate transportation to and from the prison.

Relationships are a critical factor for women attempting to reestablish their lives following incarceration. Previous relationships can have a negative or positive effect on what happens during incarceration, and they have a strong influence on women's parenting transition following incarceration.

Relationship as a Conduit

As a subtheme, relationship as a conduit addresses the nature and quality of relationships that the study's participants had with their children before their incarceration and following their release. Pre- and post-incarceration relationships work as conduits for formerly incarcerated women when they transition back to parenting. For all 12 participants in this study, the mother/child relationship following incarceration was described in positive terms in 71 direct quotes associated with this sub-theme.

According to Daffodil, prior to her incarceration, her relationship with her children lacked engagement:

So, financially, I did what I felt that I needed to you, but other than that, I was not

there for my children. I know that this was really hard on them because even

though I was around, we had no relationship and I was high most of the time.

(Daffodil)

Daffodil indicated that her daughter provided most of the structure in their home:

During my time in addiction, my daughter would always wake up and check on

me to make sure that I was okay. This did put a big strain on our relationship. I

know now that I made her grow up too fast. I was making her deal with things

that she was too young for and at one point, she really felt like she had to raise the

kids and sometimes we would argue if I them one thing, and she had told them

another. She believed that she was more responsible than I was, so she was

protective of her siblings, even from me, their mother. (Daffodil)

Violet also described the relationship with her children as one of encouragement

and support:

I think that our relationship was really good. We had a nurturing and healthy

relationship. My children tell me a lot that they love me and that I was a good

mother. This was happening before I went to prison and even afterwards. And

even though I was using a lot of drugs, I believe that that they loved me because I

was not an active drug user. (Violet)

In Rose's case, her familial relationship could best be described as protective

parenting, as her family caregiver continued to provide protection for her children:

> Before I went to prison, I was getting high all of the time. I had my children with my about six months before I went to prison and at that time, I gave custody to their fathers sister, their aunt. I get along really well with her and I wanted my children to be safe and not be around me when I was using and getting high. (Rose)

While the above quotes do not fully represent of all the participants' experiences, the intensity displayed in the women's comments highlights the significance that relationships serve as conduits for resumption of the parental relationship.

The following sub-theme describes the manner in which mothers engage in the act of parenting.

Responsibilities

Participants in the study perceived their parental role to be one of tasks, commitments, and responsibilities. The underlying commonalities from the sub-theme "responsibilities" are represented in 28 quotations from all 12 interviews, and they address views concerning the parental role. While some participants identified their parental responsibility to guide, nurture, develop, and love their offspring, other women focused on the importance of educating their children. Daffodil asserted that the parenting responsibilities included nurturing the child and always being there to support them:

> I think it's one thing to be there financially for your kid. That's important too, but there are things that are more important than buying them things. I think that it's more important to be there for your child. (Daffodil)

For Violet, providing discipline and structure were critically important, as well as simply being there for them:

> To show the kids that their parent cares both them and what they do. I believe that if you discipline your child, they [child] might feel like you're wrong, but deep down inside, they [child] knows that you care about them. (Violet)

Despite the different responses supplied by Daffodil and Violet, their underlying belief was similar. To be an active parent, a mother must give of herself, provide structure, apply appropriate discipline, and constantly demonstrate love and concern for her child(ren). Daisy said:

> For me, I have to be a great role model to feel like a parent. I really want to be a person that they can depend on, tell things to, respect, and look up to… Like, I hope that my kids adore and admire me one day. I want to be someone that they want to come to for anything…Protection, advice, anything.

Most of the women in the study agreed that the parent role requires a commitment to caring for the child and providing for their basic needs. However, for women newly released from prison, it is not an easy task. Therefore, the mothers in co-parenting relationships may be better situated to succeed in their transition to parenting due to the aid and support they receive.

Coparenting Post Release

As an a priori theme in this study, coparenting post release occurs when parental duties and responsibilities are shared between the child's kin caregiver and the formerly incarcerated mother. This relationship can exist even when the kin caregiver lives apart

from the family. When a co-parenting relationship supports the mother's sense of her maternal identity, it can have a positive effect on the resumption of parenting. As a code/theme, co-parenting was represented in eight of the 12 interviews, and it yielded a high level of intensity for the women whose narratives were represented. The quotes associated with this theme display a rich narrative concerning the processes that occur during this transitional period. In some cases, formerly incarcerated women went to live in the homes of their child(ren)'s kin caregiver and thereby entered co-parenting relationships. Other women returned home to their husband or fiancé who had been caring for their child(ren) and resumed the co-parenting arrangement they had prior to their incarceration.

Orchid returned to a co-parenting relationship with her fiancé, who is also her child's biological father. As their child's caregiver during her incarceration, Orchid's fiancé made an effort to facilitate her return to the family unit:

> So, there are times when my son will have tantrums and his dad will get him and tell him that you cannot do that. He reminded my son that I'm his mom and that he is wrong to tell me that he doesn't love me. When it comes down to discipline, my son seems to look at me like I'm wrong to discipline him. (Orchid)

Upon reflection of her co-parenting situation, Orchid explained how her fiancé provided authoritative support during her transition to full-time mom. He helped their son Aiden to regain his respect for Orchid as an authority figure after her return home, as their separation due to her incarceration had greatly undermined her maternal position.

Daisy discussed her similar co-parenting post-release situation regarding her older sister, who served as her children's caregiver while she was incarcerated:

There are times that my oldest daughter can be hard on me, but I do understand that because my sister was taking care of her while I was in prison. My daughter listens better to my sister than she does for me. (Daisy)

For Daisy, co-parenting occurred naturally when she was paroled to her sister's home following her release from prison. Although grateful for her sister's support, Daisy expressed some frustration with the situation, noting that her daughter would listen to her before she went to prison, and now to get cooperation from her daughter, Daisy stated, "I have to get assistance from my sister."

Violet's situation is more complicated, since she is post-release co-parenting with her younger son's biological father and her mother:

So, I do teamwork with his father with him. So, if we have a problem or something that we don't think is right, we can talk about it and make a decision together. (Violet)

Violet noted that she and her son's father refrain from arguing about parenting, and she expressed her appreciation that her son's father also serves as a father figure for her older children.

As demonstrated by the co-parenting post-release theme responses from the study sample, participants who co-parent after being released do so based on strong prior relationships. According to the participants, co-parenting relationships assisted them in reestablishing their parental roles following their release from prison.

Maternal identity can be influenced by a person's perception of themselves in relation to the communication their closest relationships confer upon them. The following section examines the views that previously incarcerated African American women who participated in this study held toward various aspects of their maternal identity.

Maternal Identity

The fifth theme, maternal identity, is defined by the study participants' maternal image or their view of their 'self' as mother. The participants' direct quotes were key in the selection of this theme, particularly how their maternal identity applied to responses relating to (a) their dreams of being a certain type of parent (29 quotes), (b) their desires and aspirations for self and children (39 quotes), (c) parenting esteem (29 quotes), (d) protective parenting (8 quotes), and (e) coping with being separated from children (7 quotes). All 12 of the interviews addressed some aspect of these sub-themes, which were representative of the larger theme of maternal identity. Deriving from the direct quotes of participant narratives, these sub-themes demonstrate salience combined with high-level intensity for a combined groundedness score of 112 (one hundred and twelve).

Dreams of Being a Parent

The subtheme dreams of being a certain type of parent elicited 29 quotations from the 12 interviews. A commonality between the participants in this study was the women's declarations of their desire to better provide financially for the care of their children and to be the best mother they could possibly be. As noted in their narratives, one-third of the participants, (four of 12), acknowledged that their self-perception as parents had changed as a result of their incarceration.

Like the others, Primrose still strives to do more for her children, such as securing

a safer living environment and better schooling and opportunities for them. Other than

that, Primrose believes that she is doing her best as a parent:

I have the dream of buying a huge house for my kids, where they can run around

outside and play without having to worry about things happening to them in the

streets. Outside of that, I had no dreams. I guess just a dream about this kind of

mother that I want to be for my children. I do think that I am doing the best that I

can for myself and for them.

Daisy identified how her dreams and priorities for her child had changed:

I wanted to provide everything for my kids… Before I went to prison, I was

giving her everything she asked for, anything she laid her eyes on… I was getting

it, but buying them all that stuff…name brand shoes and clothes was just

unnecessary. Now, she go in the store and she won't even touch anything name

brand because she already knows. It was like I was trying to be this miracle

mother, because I mean you have to be a miracle mother to buy any and

everything.

Rather than obsessing about purchasing only name-brand items, both Daisy and

her daughter are focused on meeting their needs instead of maintaining an unreasonable

social status based on the labels on their clothes.

Iris's dreams evolved from desiring to be a *rich parent* where she could provide

for all her children's material needs to being a parent who was actively present in their

lives:

So rich, like a real rich parent so my kids never have to even think about being homeless on the street. We were on the street before many times… This was because of wanting things and buying things that we really couldn't afford and making bad decisions. For me now, being rich is spending time with my children, not money. (Iris)

Iris acknowledged that in the past she often failed to live within her financial means, noting that her priorities were now focused on responsibly providing for her children without the excessive spending that had previously placed them in a vulnerable situation, like homelessness.

One method of ascertaining how the women in the study viewed their maternal identity was by having them connect with their perception of their parental image by asking them what type of parent they dreamed of becoming. Another strategy was to determine how they connected with their children and understood them. In order to help the participants become more relaxed, at the onset of the interview the women were asked to describe their children. This proved to be a significant entry point in the interview guide by providing the participants with an opportunity to reflect on their children early in the interview process.

Desires and Aspirations for Self and Children

The common code from this sub-theme emerged from (39) direct quotes coming from nine of the 12 narrative interviews, wherein nine women expressed a strong desire to achieve more for their children and themselves.

Orchid, the mother of a three-year-old son, wanted her child to develop an inner strength that she lacked in her younger years. Describing herself as naïve and susceptible to peer pressure, Orchid wanted her son to establish strong refusal skills and not be gullible to the attractions of street life:

I was sheltered a lot as a child and I didn't want to do that same thing with my son. I think it makes you gullible and people will take advantage of you. (Orchid)

Without going into the details, Orchid admitted to having no prior arrests. She regretted not putting the needs of her child first and allowing others to take advantage of her by encouraging her to get involved in the activities that led to her incarceration.

Having dropped out of high school in grade 11, Lavender wanted her daughters to surpass her own educational accomplishments by completing college so that they could be independent with the ability to take care of themselves financially:

They will graduate and graduate on time… like in their twenties. They will be successful and will be able to take care of themselves. I do believe that their childhood is and had been good overall. They are lucky to live in a nice neighborhood and have a skateboard and a bike to ride. They get to go to good programs for school. I just know that I really want them to go to college. (Lavender)

Dahlia articulated her desire to be a strong role model for her children by instituting changes in her life that would benefit both her children and herself:

I wanted to feel like I had accomplished something good in my life. I wanted to get my high school diploma. I want that so bad. (Dahlia)

For Dahlia, it was important to demonstrate to her children that despite her past legal troubles she was able to accomplish at least one of her goals.

A woman's wishes and dreams, behaviors and accomplishments, and self-appraisal all have a bearing on her maternal identity. The following sub-theme examines participant narratives that reflect on how they view themselves as parents.

Parenting Esteem

The subtheme of parenting esteem directly relates to the main theme of "maternal identity." Parenting esteem involves individuals' evaluation of themselves as parents. It emerged as an inductive sub-theme from 29 direct participant quotes from eight of the 12 participants describing their self-image as a parent. Quotes related to maternal identity from Violet, Daisy, Carnation, and Lavender illustrated the common sub-theme of parenting esteem, with each of these participants reporting a relatively good sense of self-esteem concerning how they see themselves as parents.

Like most of the women in the study, Violet acknowledged that even "great" parents are not always perfect and that parents often make mistakes:

I was a great mother, but I fell off and made mistakes. Some big mistakes. I could have done better. (Violet)

Similar to Violet, Daisy confessed to having made poor choices in the past, but having learned from her mistakes:

I have for sure made some bad choices, but everyone has made bad choices, so I still feel good about myself and I think that I have grown a lot. I'm good with myself and I have real high self-esteem. Whatever I wasn't able to do then, I'm

able to do now and I'm happy with that. Right now, I'm trying to find a job— like

really get myself together. (Daisy)

In direct terms, Daisy articulated her parenting esteem by voicing her

determination to succeed.

Lavender evaluated her current image as a good parent, while also imagining her

potential for improving to become a great parent that her children can look back on with

pride.

Like now, I think that I am good parent and can one day be a great parent. Like

the kind of parent that when they get older and look back on their childhood, they

will say that their mom was always really there for them, you know what I'm

saying? (Lavender)

A common thread among the narratives is the positive feeling that the women

expressed about themselves. Although heavily represented across eight interviews, only

four of the participants' quotes were represented in this section, because the other four

quotes were too similar to the ones already presented.

Protective Parenting

The subtheme protective parenting was taken from eight quotes involving the

measures taken by the participants to shield their children from exposure to their

substance abuse before their incarceration. These are cases where mothers voluntarily

relinquished their child(ren), formally or informally, during their active drug use. By

giving temporary or permanent custody to a family member, these mothers engaged in

"protective parenting" in order to ensure their child(ren) had a secure and safe home environment.

Mothers who are entrenched in substance abuse issues compromise the security and safety of the child(ren). In order to protect her children, Rose turned her children over to a trusted family member:

> I had a great relationship with their father's sister and I wanted to protect my children, so I gave guardianship to her. I didn't ever want my kids to see me doing drugs or on drugs and the things that they would have had to deal with when I was getting high. (Rose)

Violet engaged a support network of friends and relatives to ensure that her children were shielded from her drug use:

> So you see, my kids were very young, so they were okay and I was very close to my family. I had friends that I had known since we were babies, and they all love my children. So really, my kids were always with someone, doing something, so when they were really small, I had a lot of help. There was always some cousin, aunt, godmother, friend around, so I never did drugs around them because I could get away. When I had to give guardianship to my mom, I wrote a letter and it was done. (Violet)

The study participants took great steps to ensure their child(ren) had a secure and safe environment, even when it involved the relinquishment of custody because of their drug abuse. Despite the sub-theme of protective parenting not demonstrating strong

groundedness across all of the interviews, the evidence it did provide confirmed it as a salient and meaningful inductive sub-theme.

The final subtheme in this section details the women's coping strategies and their emotional experiences related to the separation from their children during their incarceration.

Coping with Separation

Coping with separation from your children emerged as a sub-theme from seven quotes that occurred in two interviews with Violet and Lavender.

To cope with her own emotions and to stay involved in their lives, Violet continually wrote and phoned her children:

I pressed constantly. I pressed over the phone and when I wrote them letters. I wrote them letters constantly. I was a pressure parent. (Violet)

To ease the pain of being separated from her children, Lavender described her decision to invoke emotional detachment during her incarceration:

When I first got locked up, every day, all I would do was cry and think about them and what they were doing and everything that I was missing. So, for me to survive, I had to take away my emotions and get into some to other activities, to get away from that. I had to like… withdraw from my emotions completely so I could stop crying and missing them so much. (Lavender)

Representing a significant variation of the sub-theme of maternal identity, coping with separation from one's children was salient for the two women whose narratives were explored.

Support from community programs, from their child(ren)'s kin caregivers, and even from their own children is the last theme in the study. For most women reentering their community following incarceration, support is a critical indicator of their success.

Support

As the sixth and final theme in this study, support is defined as assistance in any form supplied to the formerly incarcerated woman. It could be in the form of program support, material goods, or emotional/relational support. According to Proulx et al. (2009), the definition for relational support is the act of awarding affirmation, securing material assistance in both personal and parental relationships, and creating an environment that supports open communication and discussion.

The theme of support appeared in 74 direct quotes from all 12 interviews. Program support occurred in five of the 12 interviews, and relational support appeared in every narrative response from the interviews.

Of the many programs that helped women during their incarceration or reentry phase, Rose discussed how the programmatic support she received helped her cope with the day-to-day childcare tasks that she found overwhelming:

I talked about in different groups that I joined— support groups. You know, for me, it was so overwhelming to give medicine to three children. (Rose)

Rose elaborated on her opinion concerning programmatic support:

I wish that there was a program that would help you get used to being back into your children's lives when are inside of prison and even after you get out. (Rose)

Jasmine was fortunate to be included in a program that focused on reentry services, where she received professional support that was conducted on a relational level:

> I have such an awesome support system and they supported me with a lot of great support. Mr. H gave me a shot at having some hope and he is such a really good teacher and he got me to see things that I didn't see in myself. (Jasmine)

Jasmine seemed genuinely grateful for the programmatic support and positive feedback she was able to receive. For other women, the bulk of the encouragement and support they received came from relatives, which in many cases were their own children. The following quotes represent relational support that Lavender, Daisy, and Carnation received from their parents and in-laws. Lavender described support she received from her parents:

> They supported me in every way. They would set it up so I could talk to their pastor from their church sometimes as well. They supported me mentally, physically, and emotionally. (Lavender)

Since Lavender and her two children reside with her parents, she receives material assistance including housing, food and other basic necessities, along with emotional/spiritual support.

> With a high level of intensity, during the interview Daisy acknowledged the strong support she received from her adoptive mother and her sister:

When I couldn't take care of my responsibility, they did it for me. They are so supportive of me and mine, When my mom was alive, she was so supportive. (Daisy)

Carnation appreciated the many ways that her mother provided support:

When I was incarcerated, she took care of my kids, which I could never repay. She even brought the kids down. (Carnation)

Carnation acknowledged that the most significant support she received from her mother was her mother's willingness to take care of her children.

Lavender, Daisy, and Carnation experienced varying degrees of relational support when it came to material goods such as providing a place to live. The women also received various levels of guidance, encouragement, and emotional/spiritual support as depicted in the quotes displayed above.

Violet, Carnation, and Marigold elaborated on the unconditional love and encouragement they received from their children and what that support meant to them as opposed to any support they received from their child(ren)'s kin caregiver.

Violet discussed how her children's support became a strong form of encouragement:

I cry almost every single time I think about it… My kids have been my rock, me strength. Many days, I was so upset and scared and worried, and they would say — nope, not today Ma—Wipe those tears! I'd be thinking— Oh my goodness, my kids are giving me strength. (Violet)

Marigold was grateful for the support she received in the form of love from her children:

It was like that they still loved me… they had no bad feelings for me. They were really little, so they didn't know that I was in prison. So, they were seeing me only twice a week, but they still loved me and they didn't resent me. I'm so thankful that they didn't resent me and that they know only love in their hearts. (Marigold)

This research builds upon and extends the research that was conducted by Garcia (2016) that examined the experiences of mothers after incarceration. This research explored the societal viewpoints of formerly incarcerated mothers and how the stigmas associated with female incarceration, impact the post incarceration maternal experience. My study extended upon this research by examining the lived experiences of African American mothers both during and post incarceration, and exploring how repeat incarceration impacts their maternal identity, and how those influences affect their family unit, household, and ultimately the community. My research and it's findings assist with closing the gaps in research relating to how repeat incarcerations influences the maternal identity negotiations.

Interpretation of the Findings

Every participant in this study voiced the importance of receiving support during their incarceration and reentry into society. Although it was a common theme noted by great intensity and groundedness, there were clear similarities and differences in the types of support that the participants received, with three of the 12 women focusing on the

importance of programmatic support post release. With regard to relational support, four of the 12 women noted the support they received from relatives, and three of the 12 women expressed the encouragement and unconditional love that came from their children.

Evaluating the experiences of 12 African American women as they reconnected to parenting following incarceration was the focus of this study. The 12 women who agreed to share their stories represented a significant range of similarities and differences with regard to their experiences.

Given its acknowledgement as a possible pathway to incarceration, it was not surprising that the first theme, history of abuse and loss was discussed by half of the women in this sample. As forms of gendered violence, the topics of intimate partner violence and sexual abuse were divulged by the women in an unsolicited and spontaneous manner during the interview process.

Caregiver trust, the second theme, comes from narratives discussing how the women in the sample decided who should care for their child(ren) during their incarceration. A wide variation of kin caregivers was noted, (see Table 1), including four sets of maternal grandparents, three biological fathers, two paternal grandparent(s), one maternal aunt, one paternal aunt, and one sister. The common theme in this category related to how the women selected their child(ren)'s caregiver, with the majority of women (nine out of 12) declaring to have selected their kin caregiver based on their confidence that the caregiver they chose was the best individual available and was someone who would care for the children like they were their own.

As the third theme, parenting transition described the women's experiences reconnecting to parenting following their release from prison. Strongly grounded, this theme had salience with 153 quotes from all 12 interviews. Five sub-themes emerged from this theme: (1) positive connections to their children (2) preparation for resuming parenting (3) maintaining contact (4) relationship as a conduit and (5) responsibilities. Nine of 12 women attested to having positive relations with their children before their incarceration, and all of the participants used positive terms when discussing their children. Three of the 12 women found parenting classes to be valuable in preparing for their resumption of parenting, and one woman expressed her desire to take a parenting class. While some women (Daffodil, Rose, Daisy, Carnation, and Lavender) viewed their return to parenting as a process, three of the women (Daisy, Violet and Lavender) described the resumption of their parental duties and responsibilities as automatic. All the women agreed that transition back to active parenting occurs in the context of their established relationships with kin caregivers and their children — not in a vacuum.

Represented across seven of the 12 interviews, the fourth theme of "co-parenting" only yielded nine direct quotes but had an impressive level of intensity in the narratives it represented. Some of the women returned to a partner's home following their incarceration, and others were paroled to the home of their child(ren)'s kin caregiver with whom they maintained a good relationship. Many of the participants discussed how co-parenting helped them regain an authoritative position with their children, while also enhancing their post-release relationship with their children.

"Maternal identity," the fifth theme, addresses how the formerly incarcerated women perceive themselves as parents. This theme was represented with good depth across all 12 interviews, and five sub-themes emerged from the larger theme based on 112 quotations. These sub-themes include: (1) dreams of being what type of parent (29 quotes) aspirations for self and children (39 quotes), parenting esteem (29 quotes) protective parenting (8 quotes) and coping with being separated from their children (7 quotes). Two of the 12 women experienced a shift from the vision of what type of parent they wanted to become to what type of a parent they believed they needed to be. Daisy discussed her journey from wanting to provide her children with every name-brand product they desired to wanting to enjoy quality time with them instead. Similarly, Iris noted her shift from thinking about what it meant to be a "rich" parent, which was her initial goal, to that of being a good parent. Most of the participants, (nine of 12), identified their aspirations and desires for their children in basic terms, such as wanting their children to become well-rounded citizens with more opportunities than they had and ultimately just wanting the best for them. Parenting esteem was represented in eight of the 12 interviews, with most women claiming to have a high degree of self-esteem. The final two sub-themes were smaller in representation with protective parenting having eight quotes and coping with being separated from their children having only seven quotes. As an unanticipated occurrence, two of the women related their experience of ensuring that their children were protected while they were actively abusing drugs by either relinquishing their parental rights or entrusting their children to family members who would better care for them during their times of drug use.

The sixth and final theme of support yielded 74 participant quotations and was represented in all 12 interviews. Five of the 12 women received support from various public or private programs. Relational support from relatives or their own children was among the more salient shared experiences in the process of transitioning back to parenting as noted in this study. Described in terms of program services, encouragement, and guidance, support was most profound when it came in the form of acceptance and unconditional love from their family members and especially their children.

In addition to the emerging themes, there were also observations that appeared to be consistent within the examined population. Several of the women spoke about their spirituality being a source of strength for them to endure their instances of incarceration and being away from their children. These statements appear to be culturally associated within the African American community.

Limitations of the Study

The sample in this study was relatively small, however it afforded a deep and rich exploration of the histories and experiences of these women that have experienced repeat incarcerations. There were women that were not comfortable discussing their experiences with incarceration and how it affected their relationships with their children, which resulted in a limitation relative to the variety of the participants that were willing to participate in the study.

Recommendations

Additional studies that examine previously incarcerated African American women and their relationships with their family members, would be beneficial to enhance the

depth of understanding regarding the barriers and challenges that this population experience when making efforts to reintegrate into society, while also increasing credibility to suggestions for supportive social change. In many instances, families of incarcerated women were overwhelmed by the responsibilities that came with providing care for the minor children of their incarcerated family member.

To aid identifying the range of issues with family and societal reintegration, family relationships, and the associated length of time that it takes to remedy these barriers, and study that tracks these experiences over a long period of time, within African American female offenders, would be beneficial. This type of study will also assist with increasing societal and community understanding and will be supportive assisting social change agents to implement efficient, sustainable, and viable supportive programming.

Implications

This study maintains several implications for policies and practices that regulate the ways in which previously incarcerated mothers receive services and maternal support and offers insights relative to the significant need to strengthen and empower African American women, which will result in positive social change. According to Gurusami (2019), African American women are not always proactive when seeking supportive services are often feel unsupported by their communities. Elliott and Reid (2019) stated that therapeutic and supportive services need to be determined and administered in an expeditious manner for the highest levels of success. As revealed in this research, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated mothers could benefit substantially from relevant

comprehensive supportive services, that assist them with effectively dealing with unresolved issues of substance addiction, abuse, domestic violence, family and relational issues, and to assist with the maintenance and reestablishment of their maternal relationships with their children, which will result in positive social change.

The findings in this study suggest that many existing programs that are dedicated to supporting maternal relationships women during incarceration, are limited and needing expansion and increased availability. Positive social change occurs when vulnerable, disenfranchised, and/or disadvantaged individuals are able to receive the benefits of practices and policies that are supportive and not oppressive (Garcia, 2016). Several of the participants that confirmed experiencing past instances of abuse, also confirmed that they did not receive any therapeutic intervention or support. Implications regarding relevant policies include offering more supportive programs that are culturally specific to African American women, considering the challenges that they endure before and after incarceration. Increased accessibility and utilization of supportive services that are specific to the needs of African American women, could reduce the likelihood of incarceration, by addressing concerns related to unaddressed traumas, drug use, and abuse, which is supportive of the creation of positive social change.

Increased understanding of the negative impacts that exists within the important family dynamics for African American women that have experienced incarcerations, is imperative with regard to developing an environment that is supportive of positive social change. The societal marginalization that women experience is similar within the criminal justice system, and feminist theory enlightened this study on the consequential

and historic mistreatment and inequity, that exists with and towards women. This mistreatment that women experienced was also combined with layers of internalized feeling of guilt, shame, and sole responsibility for incarceration and emotional separation from their family and children, despite evidence that supports oppression and systematic inequity and racism (Bush, 2012).

As evidenced by the commentary from the participants in this study, many of the ladies felt a significant amount of regret, shame, and personal responsibility, which developed a sense of both sadness and empowerment for these women. In the cases where a history of family incarcerations were present, a lack of positive role models and negative home life, appears to have increased the chances of women being incarcerated themselves (Chavis, 2012).

The findings of this research also suggests the importance of incarcerated mothers maintaining their relationship and contact with the caregiver of their children. This research suggests that it is of significant importance for social change agents to make strong efforts to increase awareness and develop and maintain effective programming that focuses specifically on the needs of women before, during, and after incarceration, including assisting the convicted mother, the caregiver of her child(ren), and her child(ren) deal with and navigate through the challenges and barriers associated with the maternal separation. The policy implications revealed in this research, support the strong suggestion that positive social change will be a consequence of the promotion and sustainability of supportive programming that focuses on maternal maintenance for incarcerated women, with both her child(ren) and their caregivers.

Conclusion

According to O'Brien (2014), contingent upon several factors, the impacts of imprisonment are plentiful. After their first incarceration, individuals that have been incarcerated deal with substantial challenges upon returning home (O'Brien, 2014). Familial relationships are impacted by multiple incarcerations in several ways, which also creates challenges upon reintegration (Anakwenze & Zuberi, 2013). Often, personal and financial hardships are already present, and instances of multiple incarceration usually creates damage within familial relationships that is challenging or impossible to repair (Foster & Hagan, 2014).

According to (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010) the consequences of managing strained relationships and living in poverty, often resulted in engaging in survival crimes and drug use for the women and children that were a product of generational incarceration. Upon reintegration, the women often felt a sense of debt to the individual(s) that provided care for their children during their incarceration, and they often dealt with reminders that they were not a respected contributor to the decisions that were made regarding their children, even though they were the biological parent. Feelings of anger, shame, guilt, and blame are themes that were prevalent within the formerly incarcerated women's lives and within the relationships that they maintained with the members of their family (Bowles et al., 2012).

There was no viable method to remedy the pain that these women and/or their family members felt, so often the formerly incarcerated mother spent a significant amount of time apologizing and making efforts to reestablish and regain confidence and

trust from their children and family members. The women of this study were all collectively main efforts to prove to their children and family members that they were trustworthy and worthy of forgiveness and a second chance.

The narratives presented give voice to women who experienced separation from their children due to incarceration, and the findings highlight the participants' experiences in their attempt to reestablish their parental responsibilities. If positive social change is to occur within this area of exploration, it seems that considerations must be made to assist incarcerated African American women reestablish and/or maintain their maternal identity and relationships with their children and families, during their incarceration and before they are released.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

APPENDIX A

Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research study. You are invited to take part in a research study about previously incarcerated women and their relationships with their children. The researcher is inviting previously incarcerated African American mothers to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. You are allowed to ask the researcher any questions that you may have.

Why am I being asked to participate?

You have been asked to participate in this research project because:
- You are a mother who is over the age of 18 with a child age 17 or younger,
- You were incarcerated in a Nevada prison as an adult, at least twice, for at least one year for each incarceration,
- You have been released for over one month and not more than three years,
- You have expressed desire to, or have made attempts to keep parenting both during and since being released from prison, and
- Your child was cared for by a relative during the times that you were incarcerated.
- You were not residing in GEO Group Reintegration House after the year 2018.
- You live in the Las Vegas Metropolitan area.

Your participation in this research is voluntary.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. If you decide to participate in the study now, you may still change your mind later. Please know that your decision to decline or participate will not affect your relationship with any segment of the criminal justice system, nor will your decision to decline or participate be shared with any parole/probation officer or other monitor.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

If you decide to participate, you change your mind at any time without any penalty. If you wish to leave, please tell the researcher at any time, and we will stop right away and you will be free to leave.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to learn more about how repeat incarceration affects African American mothers and their relationships with their children.

What procedures are involved?

The study procedures are as follows:
- You will be interviewed in person at a local library conference room, the researchers private office, or using a video conference (Duo, FaceTime, etc.), one time, for up to two hours. Out of the options offered, you will be get to choose the interview site that is best for you.
- The interview will be audio recorded, and handwritten notes will also be taken during interviews.
- The researcher will conduct a follow-up interview, to give you the chance to make sure that the researcher understood your statements, if you are willing participate. These interviews will be conducted via telephone and will last about 30 minutes.

Approximately 12 participants may be involved in this research.

Appendix A: Consent Form continued

APPENDIX A

What are the potential risks?

It is possible that you may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. The risks and discomfort are considered to be minor. However, if you experience any distress during the interview, you may ask to take a break, or stop at any time. You will be provided with a referral list with resources for you to use, if you feel that you are in need of counseling. A risk of this research is a loss of privacy or confidentiality. There may be risks from the study that are not known at this time. To the best of my knowledge, the things you will be doing, will have no more risk of harm then you would experience in your every day life.

Are there benefits to taking part in this research?

The study is not designed to benefit you directly. This study is designed to learn more about how AfricanAmerican women's maternal identities are influenced by multiple incarceration and how their relationships with their children and family continuity are impacted, and to positively contribute to social change.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

The researcher is required to protect your privacy. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project.

- All personal information will be given a fake name (pseudonym) and will be stored in a locked cabinet where only the researcher has access.
- Your personal information will not be shared with anyone else to protect confidentiality. If the researcher were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, the researcher is required to remove all names and identifying details before sharing; this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent.
- All audio tapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet, where unauthorized persons will not have access to.
- Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

What are the costs for participating in this research?

There are no cost to you for participating in this research.

Payment

There will be no financial payment for participating in this study, but each participant will receive one small gift of either scented lotion, bubble bath, coffee, or hot chocolate, that will be given to each participant at the beginning of the interview.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

Contact the researcher Shameka Davis at 702-487-1534 or shameka.Davis2@waldenu.edu if you have any questions about the study or your part in it, if you feel you need another referral for counseling or other similar resources, or if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research. You may also contact my faculty chair person: Dr. Wayne Wallace at: wayne.wallace2@mail.waldenu.edu If you have questions about your participant rights, you can contact a Walden University research participant advocate at 612-312-1210 or at irb@mail.waldenu.edu

Appendix A: Consent Form continued

APPENDIX A

Obtaining Your Consent

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent by replying to this email with the words, "I consent." You might wish to retain this consent form for your records. You can print this consent form or save it to keep for your records.

Resources for Therapy and Support

Below are places that you can go immediately, if you need additional therapy services or support. You can call these numbers and receive quick or immediate appointments.

1.) Dr. David Linden
2725 S. Jones Blvd
Las Vegas NV 89146
702-384-2238

2.) Empowerment Centre
220 E. Horizon Dr.
Suite G
Las Vegas NV, 89015
702-605-2766

3.)Human Behavior Institute
2740 S. Jones Blvd
Las Vegas NV 89164
702-248-8866

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

APPENDIX B

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol (Guide)

Date_____

Location _____

Name of Interviewer _____

Name of Interviewee (Pseudonym) _____

Number of biological children_____ Age(s)_____

How many times have you been incarcerated?_____

- Please tell me about your children.
- Please describe your relationship with your children prior to going to prison.
- How would you describe your relationship with your child/children since you have been re-leased from prison?
- Please describe how your relationship with your children was affected by your incarceration after your first incarceration.
- Please describe how your relationship with your children was affected by your incarceration all of the other times of incarceration.
- Please tell me what it was like after you returned home, after each incarceration.
- What were your expectations for your return home with your children?
- How were you able to maintain contact with your children while you were in prison?
-       PROBE: In what ways did you maintain contact? By letters, phone, or face-to-face visits (how often)? Please describe the visit, if applicable.
- How did you decide who should care for your children while you were in prison?
-       PROBE: Was this the only person available or the best person available?
- Please describe your relationship with your child's caregiver prior to going to prison.
- What does being a mother mean to you? What are the roles, responsibilities, tasks, or commit-ments of being a mother?
- What experiences shaped the way you feel about yourself as a parent?
-       PROBE: Will you please tell me how? Please give examples.
- Did your child's family caregiver support you while incarcerated?
-       PROBE: Please explain the kind of support that you received.
- How do you think that your incarcerations affected your children?
- How do you think that your incarceration affected your relationships with your family?

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Guide Continued

APPENDIX B

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol (Guide) continued...

- Has your view of yourself as a parent changed since you were released from prison?
- PROBE: Will you please tell me about how your perceptions have changed (If applicable)?
- What type of feedback did you get from others that has influenced how you see yourself as a parent today? Please be specific.
- As of today, with trying to reestablish your relationships with your children, what stands out the most in your mind?
- How do you describe your role in your children's lives before incarceration?
- How do you describe your role in your children's lives today?
- Is there anything that I did not ask you, that you want to talk about regarding your experiences as a mother?
- What has been the most helpful to you since your last release?
- PROBE: Will you please get some specific examples of how this was helpful to you as a parent?

Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer

Appendix C

Recruitment Flyer

STUDY PARTICIPANTS NEEDED
Are you an African American woman who has previously been incarcerated?

I am doctoral student at Walden University and I am conducting a study to learn more about how being in prison affects African-American women's ability to parent during and after prison. I would love to interview you and hear your story.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:
- Participate in a taped interview and give details about your experience as a parent, both during and after leaving prison.
- Talk about your relationship with your child and your child(ren)'s caregiver.
- Talk about yourself as a parent.
- Talk about your relationship with your children.

You may be a part of this study if:
- You are an African-American woman, age 18 years or older, who was incarcerated at least twice, for at least one year or more as an adult, in a Nevada prison and have been released not less than a month and not more than three years.
- You live in Las Vegas.
- Your child was in the care of a family member while you were incarcerated.
- You agree to discuss your experiences about your relationship with your child(ren) and your child(ren)'s caregiver.

Your participation will be confidential and is completely voluntary. No identifying information will be published or shared with anyone, except the committee at my university. There is no financial compensation, however, I would like to give a gift of appreciation for those that choose to help and that choose to participate. Please share the information about this opportunity, with any friends or family members that are a formerly incarcerated African American mother, that is at least age 18 or older, and that may be interested in participation.

 If you are interested in learning more about becoming a part of this research study, please contact Shameka Davis at (702) 487-1534 or shameka.davis2@waldenu.edu

Appendix D: Recruitment Script

APPENDIX D

Recruitment Script

Hi. Thank you for your interest in my study. I am conducting this study to explore African American women's relationships with their children and how being incarcerated has affected those relationships. If you decide to participate in this study, we will have a face to face or video interview, that will take approximately an hour and a half.

Is it okay if I ask you some questions first, to see if you are eligible to participate in this study?

Questions:

1.) Do you identify as African-American? _____
2.) Are you 18 years old or older?_____
3.) Do you live in Las Vegas?_____
4.) Have you been incarcerated as an adult for at least two times?_____
        -Have you been incarcerated for at least one year, each time that you were incarcerated?_____
5.)How long have you been released from prison?_____
6.) When is the last time that you were incarcerated?_____
7.)Do you have children, under the age of 17? _____
8.) Did your children live with family or friends while you were incarcerated?_____
9.) After your release from prison, did you attempt (or are you still attempting) to regain your relationships with your children?_____

If **NOT** eligible: *I am so sorry, but based on the information that you have given me, you are not eligible to participate in this particular study. Thank you so much for answering my questions and for taking the time to call me. I really appreciate it.*

If **eligible**: *Based on the information that you have provided to me, you are eligible to participate in this study. The place of the interview will depend on where you would like to meet, but we can meet at a local library in a private meeting room, my office, or we can have a video conference meeting.*

May I have your email address to send you a consent form that will give you some more information about the study?

Appendix E: CITI Certificate