

2019

# Lived Experiences of African American Involved with an Incarcerated Intimate Partner

Sharon V. Alston  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Sharon V. Alston

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Lived Experiences of African American Women Involved with an Incarcerated Intimate

Partner

By

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EdS, Seton Hall University, 2005

MA, Seton Hall University, 2003

BA, Bloomfield College, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

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2018

## Abstract

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) accumulates annual data from state department of corrections. The information that the BJS accumulates annually is relevant to this study because it shows the possibility of the many African American women as well as other women in need of assistance while their loved one is incarcerated. The purpose of this study was to explore lived experiences of African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate. The focal point of interest was how lived experiences affect African American women's physical and psychological well-being. The theoretical framework for this study comprised both the resilience theory and Bandura's self-efficacy theory. The research question that guided this study was: What are the significant experiences acquired during the incarceration process of the spouse, partner, or mate? Data were collected using semi structured interviews conducted with African American women over the age of 18 from a metropolitan city in the northeastern United States with incarcerated spouses, partners, or mates. NVivo software was used to find emergent themes from the data. The conclusions from the research, has endorsed positive social change by enlightening the helping professional. There are psychological implications that these women encountered during their lived experiences such as anxiety disorder, depression, trauma, stigma and shame, as well as criminality by association by staying in the relationship. The community should sustain these anguished women and be a factor in their well-being during the incarceration of their spouses, partners, or mates, as well as guiding them through the penal system via a resource center.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this study to Jesus Christ, the God of my salvation. If it were not for Him I would not have survived this journey. I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me (Philippians 4:13). I dedicate this study to my deceased God-Mother, Gladys Green, who was my biggest cheerleader while I was on this journey. She did not get to see the end, but I know she was still cheering me on in my darkest days from Heaven. I want her to know I felt her throughout this journey after her untimely death. I dedicate this study to my Mother, Wilma R. Alston, who listened to the complaints I had about the wrong that was done during this journey of higher learning. I dedicate this study to my children, Andre and Sabria. I dedicate this study to my Pastor, Dr. CH Evans, PhD, as well as my sisters in Christ, Partecia Powell, LaNeeka Henry and my brothers in Christ, Aaron Thomas, Obbie Williams. I also dedicate the academia portion of this study to Dr. Princess Towe. Each of you knows your place throughout this journey. Without the support of each one of these people, I would have had a much harder time completing my education and fulfilling my destiny to having a PhD in Clinical Psychology.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

In America, the incarcerated male population has quadrupled from 1976 to 2016 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016). At the end of 2015, 6,851,000 persons were in the custody of the United States adult correctional system (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015). This high rate of incarceration can be attributed to drugs, violence, property theft and the dramatic increase of other crimes (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015).

When these men are arrested, they go from civilians to criminals, and later, in many cases, to ex-convicts. They have families that they leave behind, and by association, their African American female counterparts, who encounter difficulties including survival skills and understanding their lived experiences, due to the incarceration of their mates (Wildeman, Schnittker, & Turney, 2012). African American women separated from their imprisoned partners confront the hazards of separation and loss at psychological, social, and physical levels (Apel et al., 2010; Duwe & Clarke, 2013; Harman, Smith, & Eagan, 2010; Wildeman et al., 2012). These women and their families encounter the adverse consequences of the incarceration process (Murray, Bijleveld, Farrington, & Loeber, 2014; Turney, Schnittker & Wildeman, 2012; Black, 2010; Chui, 2009; Comfort, 2008).

The wives and girlfriends of the imprisoned are trapped in the rotating door of the penal system (Comfort, 2008; Braman, 2004; Fishman, 1990) and are affected by constrained rights, detracted resources, and social marginalization as well as other consequences while not legally guilty of any crime themselves, nor being incarcerated

(Comfort, 2008; Braman, 2004). This dilemma in theoretical and knowledge gaps may hinder the advancement of specific knowledge applicable to specific treatment for African American women who remain involved with the incarcerated mate. Understanding their lived experiences may be useful to inform treatment providers on how best to support these women (Gangamma, Holowacz, Hartwell, & Glebova, 2015; Schwartz-Soicher, Geller, & Garfinkel, 2011).

Anxiety, anger, isolation, and other emotional responses are traits cited in the literature that are comparable to depression for African American women (Beck, Cooper, & McLanahan, 2010; Duwe & Clark, 2013; Kins, Soenens, & Beyer, 2013; Turney et al., 2012). Depression is addressed in the literature more than life dissatisfaction for African American women (Poleshuck, Cerrito, Leshoure, Finocan-Kaag, & Kearney, 2013; Wildeman et al., 2012). In the life of African American women, life dissatisfaction may develop and become compounded by societal shame and stigma when it is related to imprisonment (Massoglia, Remster, & King, 2011), and this is representative, too, of how the public is unsympathetic to the dilemma of these women (DeFina & Hannon, 2013). There can be also physical reactions to depression, which can include health-related illnesses related to physical separation due to incarceration (Lee, Porter, & Comfort, 2014).

According to Choi and Pyun (2014), African American women have the ability to use coping skills that allow them to safeguard against destructive defeatism. There are, however, African American women who are unable to cope with the situation of their partners' incarceration. Hardships may persistently increase, and the destructive

influences may possibly permeate the family in the community (Kelly, Mayingo, Wesley, and Durham, 2013; Martensen, 2011; Harman et al., 2010; Wakefield and Uggen, 2010).

### **Background**

The lived experiences of African American women with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate have not been explored. After I worked with this population of African American women who reside in and around a metropolitan city in the northeastern United States in a significant relationship with an incarcerated male partner, they appeared to be a distinctive set of women for the research. These ladies are confronted with extra obstacles and difficulties, such as psychological, physical, and social adversities, related to the incarceration of a partner that multiplies their affliction (Comfort, 2008; Braman, 2004; Fishman, 1990).

Since the 1970s in America, the incarceration of males has reached epic proportions (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015). Correction authorities, both state and federal, had 1,508,600 inmates in custody by the end of December 2014 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015). In a metropolitan city in the northeastern United States, the data that were used in this study from the BJS was inclusive of inmates sentenced for more than 1 year. In the state of New Jersey alone, there were 25,263 inmates as of October 2015 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014). This phenomenon of mass male incarceration affects other ethnic groups as well as African Americans. This phenomenon of mass incarceration in the United States can also be noted to affect the target group of African American women who are not incarcerated (see Hart-Johnson, 2014). By involvement and association, there are spouses left behind as well as children and other family

members (Cox, 2011; Geller, Garfinkel, & Western, 2011; Harknett & Hartnett, 2011; Wildeman et al., 2012). A significant number of females with incarcerated spouses suffer from separation anxiety with adverse psychological, physical, and social effects (Kins et al., 2013). African American women who are prisoners' partners are confronted with a plethora of problems connected to the incarceration of their partners (Comfort, 2008; Wildeman et al., 2012).

Various African American women who stay with their incarcerated partners are consistent in visiting and supporting them during the time of incarceration (Black, 2010). According to Dixey and Woodall (2012), inmates that have family support are least likely to be statistics of recidivism. The plights of African American women who experience the incarceration process of a spouse will be discussed from the circumstances associated from the arrest through incarceration that might have affected them. African American females endure their lived experiences while continuing to stay with their incarcerated partner.

African American women may encounter financial hardship or disciplinary issues with children during their spouses' time of incarceration (Hannem, 2009; Turney et al., 2012). For example, if the inmate was employed before incarceration, his partner may now need to secure other avenues of support to replace the lost income. This hardship is especially critical when children are involved (Schwartz-Soicher, Geller, & Garfinkel, 2011). The challenges that she faces in raising children alone also affects the mother (Cox, 2012).



Children with incarcerated fathers who lived with them preceding incarceration are strongly affected by aggressive behavior, such as oppositional defiance disorder, and augmented attention issues, such as attention deficit hyperactive disorder (Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher, & Mincy, 2012). Incarceration can also lead to financial, psychological, social, and family issues and affect the stress and health of the entire family. One of the most important entities of the African American family, who are the women, is not addressed in the literature; however, it warrants the development of treatment programs for the female partner. This may allow for the possibilities of solutions that exist in the criminal justice system for women to receive help through the penal system. African American women may need to receive mental health counseling and learn new critical thinking and coping skills strategies to acquire the ability to make informed decisions regarding their situation (Wildeman et al., 2011; Bandura, 1986).

Incarceration comes with stigma for African American women; often, they meet a deficiency in care and sensitivity from social services (Fishman, 1990; Hannem, 2009), resulting in a lack of financial and psychological assistance (Braman, 2004). According to Comfort (2008), the social work profession has not been supportive to these women and their families. Grief, stress, and loneliness are major reactions for the African American woman's mental health that may lead to psychological disorders (Chui, 2009). Wildeman et al. (2012) posited that depression was prevalent in a trial of African American women with imprisoned partners. This depression may not apply to just a solitary experience and may lead to other adverse life issues (Perry, Pullen, and Oser, 2012). Fahmy and Berman (2012) discussed anxiety and how it affects the mother who is

left alone to raise the children because the father is incarcerated and how she may be much more aggressive in discipline (Arditti, 2012). African American women with children and an incarcerated partner create what is deemed as “doing gender,” described as the mother taking on the responsibility of the incarcerated partner; the mother becomes a substitute for the father and now the disciplinarian (Black, 2010). Research has revealed that many times the children in these fragile families exhibit behavioral issues (Turney, 2011). Incarceration is a traumatic experience for the entire family (DeVeaux, 2013).

A woman’s reactions to the incarceration experience of their partner can include the issues of fear, anger, depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, eating disorders as well as other problems (Hart-Johnson, 2014; Fahmy and Berman, 2012). The issues of having to become the head of household and often the disciplinarian of their children, help add to the lived experiences of African American women that often affects their mental health (Wildeman et al., 2012). However, there does not seem to be any correlation or association in the literature of the survival skills of African American women with an incarcerated partner. I could find little to no extant literature on the topic at hand, understanding the lived experiences of African American women with an incarcerated spouses, partners, or mates.

The emotions that may be experienced by African American women in regard to the incarceration of their partner can be complicated by the many emotions that women experience. According to Hart-Johnson, (2014), African American women are capable of managing loss appropriate to their ability to utilize their coping skills. Hart-Johnson also

posited that there is a grief process that this population experiences that is similar to normal grief, as with someone who loses someone to death. When a significant other is incarcerated, numerous African American women are unable to use the coping strategies that they have learned throughout their lives (Steven-Watkins, Knighton, Oser, & Leukefeld, 2013). This population has difficulty coping with the stress of this loss, due to the unknown (Steven-Watkins et al., 2013). Moreover, the grief process, when there is a loss due to incarceration of a loved one, is different from the grief of death experience from the death of a partner (Fried, Arjadi, Amshoff, Tuelinckx, Bockting, Borsboom, Cramer, Epskamp and Carr, 2015). The seven grief stages identified by Kubler- Ross, (1967) are: shock and denial, pain and guilt, anger and bargaining, depression, reflection and loneliness, reconstruction and working, and acceptance and expectation. Kubler-Ross' book (1967) has been used by many researchers in their research on grief; however, some writers have varied in describing the stages using the same concept. Hart-Johnson (2014) suggested that African American women in the example encountered sorrow comparable to losing a loved one through death. This population experiences grief the same as the characteristics of Kubler-Ross' stages of grief and the results of the Hart-Johnson's (2014) grounded theory study on grief and coping with symbolic imprisonment.

In this study, I used the qualitative approach to explain the importance of the association connecting African American women's mental health and their involvement with their incarcerated partner. The main point is to ascertain whether understanding the lived experiences are affected; to date, there is a paucity of research in the literature on

the topic. In a quantitative study, Wildeman et al. (2012) hypothesized that the confinement of the spouse is considerably related to a greater risk of depression; however, the authors found that life dissatisfaction was more consistent. African American women were also discovered to absorb lengthened positions of societal seclusion, imitating their spouse's states of confinement (Fishman, 1990). Therefore, fundamentally understanding how African American women manage their survival skills as well as understand their lived experiences while their loved one is incarcerated will provide a more tailored treatment plan for this population.

The end goal of this study was to assist in creating optimistic social change for the population of African American women with an incarcerated partner by providing insight to help this population make more informed decisions about treatment. With the results of this study, the helping professional will enhance their understanding of this population. Although African American women with an incarcerated partner experience depression, this depression is situational, and treatment modalities can be tailored to their crisis. With the findings of this study, social services groups will also become more knowledgeable and can implement programs to assist this population.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is a plethora of literature concerned with helping incarcerated men modify their conduct so they can remain out of prison as well as to help them communicate with their children. There are related programs, such as Health Options Mean Empowerment and Inside Outside Dad (Comfort, McCartney, Koester, & Neiland, 2008; Grinstead, 1993). In addition, there are other programs that help incarcerated men cope with

substance abuse, anger management, and HIV/AIDS issues; however, there are no programs helping women involved with incarcerated men because they are not the incarcerated (Braman, 2007; Comfort, 2008). My search of multiple databases located no studies centered on the lived experiences of African American women with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate.

In their quantitative study, Wildeman et al. (2012) hypothesized that the incarceration of the spouse is considerably associated with a greater imperil of depression. For the rationale of their research, they used the definition of depression from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5* (2013), which is: an intense sadness with feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, as well as worthlessness for a period of 2 weeks or more. Depression is an abnormal reaction to life's tensions or an ill-treated self-esteem (Wildeman et al., 2012); for example, separation from an incarcerated loved one. In the same study, the researchers found life dissatisfaction to be more consistent in the population than depression. According to Wildeman et al., (2012) depression transpires when paternal incarceration happens and the maternal partner experiences hardships in the family, such as depletion in finances, the stigma resulting from this crisis, and the instability of the family.

Destabilization of families may occur when the male partner is incarcerated; for example, the female may possibly form new relationships while the male is imprisoned (Braman, 2004). The challenges presented by the incarceration of the male may elevate the stress level of the female and diminish her ability to function in the home (Comfort, 2008). The African American woman's mental health is challenged (Fishman, 1990).

Programs can be created to help these women acquire coping strategies for their survival as well as other mental health issues. Comfort (2008) suggested an idea that requires the use of props, desire, and harmonization to preserve a relationship with their partners; this exposes how the “carceral apparatus” guides the behavior of women who are on the outside of the prison that their husbands are in (Comfort, 2008, page 47). Prior research has proposed that preserving family relations adds optimistically to successful rehabilitation (Comfort, 2008). Therefore, the results of this research may empower African American women with an incarcerated partner to help minimize recidivism, which may alleviate the depression that these women suffer due to that incarceration (see Wildeman et al., 2012). Fishman (1990) found that depression was one of four similar reasons reported by the wives of the incarcerated men. According to Fishman, depression occurs when African American women are inundated with duties as well as diverging stressors. In the study, Fishman observed that when families were able to freely mingle without restrictions, depressive symptoms would subside. Thus, the development of programs for prisoners’ partners would be beneficial for the entire family.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner or mate, specifically living in a metropolitan city in the northeastern United States. In this study, I connected the understanding of the lived experience of the African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner or mate particularly resilience and self-efficacy. Situations may be “stressful to the level that even a trained expert may be mentally

affected” (Leach, 1994, p. 75). The African American woman should be mentally and physically resilient during the situation they are experiencing during the incarceration of their spouse, partner, or mate.

The helping professional may be able to recognize that the difficulties of this lived experience are due to the incarceration of the spouses, partners or mates and allow greater empathy for the welfare of African American women in this situation. Hence, a determination can be made by the African American woman with the helping professional as to whether she should or should not seek professional services to develop resilience or self-efficacy skills to help build upon making better informed decisions.

### **Research Questions**

The research question at the center of this study was: What are lived experiences of African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate?

### **Conceptual Framework**

I established the conceptual framework for this research on two theories. Resilience is described by some present-day scholars as a vibrant method that is comprised of individual characteristics (Bandura, 1994) and was acknowledged by Bandura (1977) as self-efficacy. An additional method to examining resilience believes it is “a dynamic process of successful adaptation to adversity revealed through the lens of developmental psychopathology” (Zautra et al., 2008, p. 4). Researchers using this process-oriented method investigate individuals’ aptitudes and societal sustainability and how they attach to flexibility (Boerner & Jopp, 2010; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This process-oriented method highlights individual characters and delves into societal

mechanisms, surroundings, and how they work concurrently to encourage resilience (Bandura, 1994).

The second theory credited to Bandura (1977) is the self-efficacy theory used in this present study. Bandura (1995) developed this theory to help explain how people control their abilities that create selected stages of presentations to implement the effect of significant events. According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy consists of the elements of self-persuasion that individuals collect from fragments and examples of information concerning their perceptions on their mastery of prior functioning, explicit experiences, contrasting themselves with others, vocal influence from societal pressure, and their physiological conditions at these times. Bandura (1995) posited that cognitive, affective, personal, and environmental factors establish human motivation and actions and that the human cognitive process consisted of thought patterns either to support or encumber the capability in achieving numerous responsibilities. The human cognitive process also depends on the capability to obtain deductions concerning present situations, whereas at the same time, accounting for previous experiences, which is then used to foresee future presentation (Bandura, 1995). During this process, it is probable for one to determine their capabilities in precise perspective, which then permits them to connect the behavior required to efficiently finish responsibilities for satisfying the tasks (Bandura, 1994).

Using the framework for this study, I examined the theme of survival skills from the literature focused on understanding the lived experiences of African American women with incarcerated partners. This precise conceptualized framework was chosen because of the association with the investigation dilemma of the study and how the



conceptual framework supported the research question and the concepts which were ingrained in the research question. I designed the interview questions to cover the fine distinctions between each of the aforementioned concepts as well. The conceptual framework will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

### **Nature of the Study**

The study was qualitative in nature. Phenomenology is used to describe their lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The use of this approach was optimal for this study due to the paucity in the literature for the research topic (see Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology is used to develop a “composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals” (Creswell, 2007, p. 63). The methodology is involved with the identification is made of the fundamental temperament of individual understanding about a phenomenon depicted by participants in the research. During the procedure, the examiner brackets or sets aside their encounters to appreciate the participants in the investigation (Nieswiadomy, 1993). I implemented Moustakas’ (1994) phenomenological method in this study to enhance the *what* and *how* experience. Using the quantitative methodology would not have been reasonable for this study because there were no targeted variables or a theory to authenticate or test (see Auerbach, Salick, & Fine, 2006).

In this study, I used semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. Ten African American women that self-identify having a relationship with a presently incarcerated partner were interviewed. The inclusion criteria for this study were the partner must have been currently serving not less than a 1-year jail or prison sentence.

This standard was established on the foundation that the average incarcerated male serves between 1 to 30 years in jail or prison (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015). I will explain this process more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

### **Definitions**

*African American women:* An American African woman that self-identifies with this ethnic group. The other synonymous terminologies are: Black and Negro. Numerous people prefer African-American rather than *Black* when referring to Americans of African descent (Street et al., 2012; Robinson-Brown & Keith, 2003).

*Carceral population:* Belonging to a prison (Comfort, 2008).

*Depression:* An intense sadness with feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, as well as worthlessness for a period of 2 weeks or more. It is an abnormal reaction to deficit, life's tensions or an ill-treated self-esteem (e.g., separation from an incarcerated loved one) (APA, 2013).

*Epoche:* The researcher sets aside (i.e., brackets) their encounters to take a clean perception concerning the phenomenon under examination (Creswell, 2007).

*Incarceration:* Confinement in a state or federal prison for a period of time. Other terms used within this study are: *detained detention* and *imprisonment* (BJS, 2014).

*Inmate:* A person that is held for more than 1 year in the custody of the Department of Corrections (BJS, 2014).

*Life dissatisfaction:* When paternal incarceration happens and the maternal partner experiences hardships in the family, such as the depletion in finances, the stigma resulting from this crisis, and the instability of the family (Wildeman et al., 2012).

*Lived experience*: The reality of the person telling his or her story (Moustakas, 1994).

*Nondeath loss*: Loss experienced of the male partner of the family (Walsh, 2012).

*Mass incarceration*: A phenomenon that came about beginning in the 1970s due to the amount of people being imprisoned in the United States. This phrase was created by Garland (2001), who felt this phenomenon was commendable enough for study and scientific attention. Wildeman (2014) has suggested that this expression is used to explain excessively elevated imprisonment rates of African American men.

*Phenomenology*: The method of understanding the essence of others' lived experiences based upon divergent procedural background of inquiries that investigate societal or individual tribulations (Moustaka, 1994).

*Resilience*: The personal traits, processes, and results that work jointly to help a person return to a condition of stability after an adverse experience (Southwick & Chaney, 2012; Zolli & Healy, 2012).

*Self-efficacy*: A person's confidence about their abilities to make designated intensity of performance that implement influences in excess of proceedings that effect their lives; further, self-efficacy ideas decide how individuals may sense, reflect, self-inspire, and act (Bandura, 1977).

*Survival skills*: When the consequences of stress test human thresholds, the benefits of being taught to perform in stress and shaping individual limits that may overshadow the disadvantage of stress (Leach, 1994). According to Leach (1994), the

undeniable strategies and mental gear assisting individuals to develop survival skills include concentrating on a controllable task and acknowledging denial.

### **Assumptions**

The primary assumption I held in this investigation was that the participants would provide honest as well as detailed answers to the questions. Another assumption was that the basis of the study was appropriate for the framework. The next assumption was the phenomenological methodology was suitable for the investigation of the research question and to advance the data of the topic throughout the enhancement of the substantive theory. I also assumed that the population sample would be difficult to reach due to stigma related to incarceration (see Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Hannem, 2009). Possible participants may have not wanted to participate due to several reasons, such as embarrassment, shame, and/or paranoia.

### **Scope**

I limited the scope of this study to an expediency sample of obtainable subjects that met a particular criterion, which were African American women with incarcerated partners. In this study, I depended on the participants' recall as well as self-reflection on their experiences with their incarcerated partners. This focused sample permitted a thorough and comprehensive examination of the degree process associated with African American women's lived experiences and survivor skills during a mate's incarceration.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this study may be the omission of other ethnic groups of women. I made this decision on the basis of the excessive dominance of all ethnic groups

of men incarcerated in the United States and due to my observations of the penal system contrary to penalties on African American women. I also made this decision to obtain an answer to the research question as well as narrow research down rather than to have multiple nationalities/ethnicities/races. Another limitation of this study was that it was only conducted in Newark, New Jersey and not across the country.

There are strong points of the study, and several prospects for further research on this topic as well as three limitations that I have identified specific to the study.

First, I used the phenomenological method in this study. Depending upon the participants' rich, profound, and honest information, in the process, I made the identification of patterns as well as themes. Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested using questions that are not meddling to develop a relationship with the participants while being empathetic as well as honest. This limitation was managed by encouraging each of the participants to tell her story in conjunction with the interview questions. This had to be done candidly and void of hesitation or I may have been seen as intrusive.

Second, due to the stigma associated with incarceration, some African American women may be reluctant to answer questions on a questionnaire, resulting in bias (Hannem, 2009). I controlled for this bias by covering a large geographical area as well as a large age difference. Not everyone is articulate, nor can everyone perceive the interview questions as they are written or meant. In order to avoid this limitation, I took time to assist the participants in the study in conducting themselves professionally. The sample was small in number and taken from a hard-to-reach population, which may pose

difficulties. Therefore, I described my beginning thoughts regarding examples, the setting, and the data collection processes and remained cognizant of changes in the data.

### **Significance**

The results of this study are significant because they distinguish the lived experiences of African American women who suffer when their partner is incarcerated. This would probably not be an issue if African American women understood that survivor skills are needed in this lived experience of their incarcerated partner. The results of this study may allow for treatment modalities to be modified supporting the welfare of African American women in this situation. Furthermore, the findings of this study may possibly give insight to clinicians and social services in providing tailored support to the women who choose to wait for the men that are affected by this phenomenon of incarceration (see Wildeman et al., 2012). There are a wide range of women who choose to continue in relationships with men who are incarcerated, and during this relationship, they become affected by many psychological concerns (Umberson, Crosnoe, & Reczek, 2010) and there is very little known, if anything, about these women's lived experiences. Comfort (2008) suggested that a focus be placed on these women by studying the phenomenon and illuminating the various ways women and the families become entangled in the penal system. Therefore, the focus of this study was to make a step toward greater comprehension regarding this population. More often than not, the system reaches into these families and prisonization reverberates in their lives (Fishman, 1990).

The results of this study contribute to social change by guiding these women through the penal system from beginning to end by enhancing their resilience and self-efficacy. I have had the experience of working with these women, and one of the positive social changes that they would benefit from is a resource center, where they could receive, free of charge, resources that could assist them in receiving services of every kind. This resource center would consist of every provision possible, from education to social services.

Researchers in the literature have suggested various approaches as to how to remedy women's coping strategies, not with resilience or self-efficacy though; usually these are women with children and no child care resources. This study was directed toward African American women with or without families, no matter the ethnicity of their incarcerated partner.

The findings from this study may contribute to these women seeking out psychological services for survival skills to deal with the vicarious experiences of incarceration. The helping professional would be able to assist this population with coping strategies and education to live a more productive life during the incarceration experience. Social change can take place when a person is resilient (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). My aspiration with this study was to acquire additional understanding as well as encouraging empathy for this population's social problem.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 1, I introduced the topic of the mass male incarceration phenomenon in America and its effect on the African American woman left behind. Next, I discussed

how African American women in New Jersey are influenced by this experience, along with the adversities they endure. Many of these women suffer from adverse socioeconomic and psychological issues, including stress, loss, and material hardship (Gangamma et al., 2015; Schwartz-Soicher et al., 2011).

I discussed the significant gap that exists in the literature on this subject in the problem statement as well as the deficiencies in coping by African American women, who may suffer psychological, physical and social responses and have inappropriate survival skills due to the destructive influence of the incarceration of a their partner. African American women are usually women of strength, and they may be able to cope with various situations; however, an experience of this magnitude may cause increased stress or anxiety (Wildeman, 2012). The research questions as well as the purpose and essential concepts for the framework were also described, and I justified the use of the qualitative method and phenomenological research design.

This chapter also included a list of definitions of terms that could be misinterpreted. I also presented assumptions and limitations of the study. Lastly, I provided the significance of the research to effect social change.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the literature reviewed and search engines used to locate sources. The conceptual framework will be recapitulated. I will also discuss resiliency theories and their association to the study, introduce strategies to assist the population, and provide a review of literature related to African American women's dilemma and the penalties of them being involved with an incarcerated mate. The chapter will also include a review of literature pertaining to African American women's



strengths and survivor skill concerns as well as the research methodologies. The chapter will end with the summary.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

In this phenomenological study, it was essential for me to have explored current and past literature of the topic being studied. The review of literature provided a solid base from which I developed new ideas to conduct this study of African American women with incarcerated spouses, partners, or mates. In the literature, I found few or no support programs for these women in or outside of the prison. They continue to experience adverse psychological, physical, and social responses to the situation of an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate. These gaps in the literature were discussed by previous researchers, including Cooke (2007); Gjesfjeld, Greeno, Kim, & Anderson (2010); Kessler (2002); and Lowenstein (1984). These researchers posited issues surrounding the psychological, social, and physical expressions of life dissatisfaction in the manifestation of depression. For African American women with an incarcerated partner, there are no programs outlined in the literature helping them with lived experiences because *they* are not the incarcerated (Comfort, 2008). In the article, “The effect of paternal incarceration on material hardship”, they posit “Many of the women who are involved with incarcerated men encounter unhealthy mental status” (Schwartz-Soicher et al., 2011, p. 449).

Stress diminishes mental health; one resultant example contributing to stress may be a mother looking forward to the father of her children coming home from being incarcerated to alleviate having to pay child care cost, and often this does not happen (Comfort, 2008; Schwartz-Soicher et al., 2011). The destabilization of families is

impacted by incarceration (Wildeman et al., 2012). These women also may possibly experience the harmful effects of divorce, separation, and nonmarital fertility (Braman, 2004). There is much research regarding the incarcerated male and how to support him during this stressful time, however, there is sparse research or literature regarding lived experiences, such as the mental health and support systems, for the woman left in the home (Wildeman et al., 2012). In this phenomenological study, I examined the lived experiences of African American women due to the incarceration of a spouse, partner, or mate.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I used a number of resources to locate sources for this literature review, including the World Wide Web, the Walden University Library, and Google Scholar. The databases I searched were: Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, CINAHL Plus with Full Text, Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials, Cochrane Methodology Register, Communication & Mass Media Complete, Computers & Applied Sciences Complete, Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effects, Education Research Complete, ERIC, Health and Psychosocial Instruments, Health Technology Assessments Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts, MAS Ultra - School Edition, MEDLINE with Full Text, Military & Government Collection, NHS Economic Evaluation Database, Political Science Complete, PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, PsycCRITIQUES, PsycEXTRA, PsycINFO: Regional Business News, Research Starters – Education, SocINDEX with Full Text-Teacher Reference Center, PsycTESTS, International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center, and Mental Measurements

Yearbook with Tests in Print. My search also included the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses at Walden University.

I used the following key words to search in string, singularly, and via amalgamation to acquire results: *African American women; Phenomenology; incarceration; inmates; lived experiences; mental illness; offenders; offenders' partners; prisoner; and prisoners' wives, girlfriends, partners, or mates*. I used articles published no later than December 2010, except where noted. Older articles relevant to this study were not used due to requirements, unless noted.

The major themes in the articles I searched were organized according to women with incarcerated spouses, partners, or mates. Other stacks replicated the central concepts that were ever-present and significant in the literature. Then, I made further delineation to the literature and organized it via dissertation chapters.

This chapter will be structured according to key subject matter acknowledged in the literature. First, I will present a conceptual framework consistent with a concentration on the result of the incarceration of a spouse, partner, or mate on the mental status of women. Second, I will provide definitions for social loss, stigma and shame, intimate separation, and incarceration. I will also discuss *Survival Psychology* (1994), describing psychological, social, and physical processes critical to survival. I will also present a review of the research methodologies. Finally, I will conclude the chapter by summarizing the literature review to reflect the findings.

## **Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

Theories provide the fortitude and the lens through which the center of this study was established (see Gringeri, Barusch & Cambron, 2013). In my review of the literature on this subject matter, I used two theories when investigating lived experiences: resilience theory and the self-efficacy theory. In the following subsections, I will present a more comprehensive discussion of each of the theories.

### **Resilience Theory**

Resilience theory examines the process of human being characteristics, societal associates, and revision to life's pressures (Reich et al., 2010; Zolli & Healy, 2012). Despite era or teachings, life is naturally demanding due to external events and trials and can put pressure on individuals (Maddi, Harvey, Khoshaba, Fazel, & Resurreccion, 2012). Prior investigations have examined how African American women endured after Katrina and how they coped with other traumatic events (Hamilton-Mason et al., 2012). Some African American women who have encountered unfavorable situations are motivated to modify the course of their young life practices, while others see themselves as victims and evidence themselves as powerless and despondent. Resilience is equally a psychological and sociological occurrence for a person raised in a racially antagonistic atmosphere (vanWormer, Sudduth, & Jackson III, 2011).

### **Self-Efficacy Theory**

Self-discovery enables individuals to achieve balance. African American women reflect self-esteem when they believe they are capable of achieving balance. The theory of self-efficacy supports a person's belief in the aptitude to manage the event of their life

(Bandura, 1986). The environment influences African American women's coping strategies, but they can identify their own issues through self-efficacy. These women encounter excessively-elevated rates of distress compared to their Caucasian female counterparts. There are culturally active coping strategies emerging to help clinicians and researchers with this population (Stevens-Watkins, Sharma, Knighton, Oser & Leukefeld, 2013). Positive self-advocacy helps individuals set higher goals and be committed to them (CITE). When negative feedback comes, people employing self-efficacy can provide a more optimistic view and response because they are able to self-reflect and increase their coping abilities. Individuals with low degrees of self-efficacy are disposed to believe that responsibilities appear more complex than they really are and will evade strenuous responsibilities overall (van Dither, Dochy, & Segers, 2011).

Values in self-efficacy and resilience have an effect on life alternatives, levels of inspiration, feature of performance, resilience to hardship, and susceptibility to trauma and depression (Bandura, 1986). Individuals value their effectiveness and are advanced by four major foundations of authority: They incorporate *perseverant events*, seeing people comparable to themselves and coping with undertaking stresses; *vicarious experiences* that an individual has the abilities to thrive in particular actions; *social persuasion*, being verbally persuaded to possess capabilities to master; and *physiological feedback*, the ability to perceive and interpret (Bandura, 1986). Truths are rife with obstacles, hardships, setbacks, frustrations, and inequities, and African American women like other women have also had these experiences. Individuals must, therefore, have a healthy sense of self-efficacy and resilience to maintain a strong will to succeed.

## **Mental Status of African American Women**

The mental status of African American women associated with the absence of a spouse, partner, or mate due to imprisonment leads to depression (Comfort, 2008). The social stigma connected to the illegal activities of the incarcerated also diminishes these women's mental status (Schwartz-Soicher et al., 2011). Schwartz-Soicher et al. (2011) employed data from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Survey to examine the effect of paternal confinement on mothers and the survey also found how incarceration affects these women. I designed this study to better understand African American women's lived experiences during the incarceration of their spouse, partner, or mate.

Sometimes, women with an imprisoned partner do not leave home because they are afraid they may miss a loved one's phone call (Abramowicz, 2012). This demonstrates a life detained, since the incarcerated loved one is not experiencing the same psychological distress as the significant other (Comfort, 2008, Fishman, 1990). These scenarios may suggest parallels linking incarceration and marital dissolution, with a high probability of anxiety, stress, or depression (Massoglia, Remster, & King, 2011). Other researchers have conducted studies on the effects of incarceration on marital dissolution using the regression model that enabled them to measure the reliability of the effect on the time away from the incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate (CITE). The importance of phenomenological research is that it allows these methods to be described and documented through the data analysis process (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

Bowlby (1980) found that acute responses to grief could develop into a pathological clinical diagnosis. Bowlby noted that the emotions connected with

depression comprised feelings of numbness, disbelief, denial, disorganization, despair, and a longing for the absent mate. Wildeman et al. (2012) reported findings consistent with Bowlby, finding a relationship between the male's current incarceration and the female's depressive symptoms. These signs were frequently manifested by stress, shame, and disbelief (Wildeman et al., 2012).

Wildeman et al. (2012) provided a connection between the incarceration of a spouse, partner, or mate and African American women's depression issues and the compound dynamics that played a part in it. They measured life dissatisfaction and major depression as variables in the concentration of single mothers from urban areas. The two dynamics are connected to the underprivileged, economic inequalities, and additional stressors (Chaney, 2009). Subsequently, the researchers did not discuss the connection between the incarcerated loved one and African American women's lived experiences.

### **Trauma**

Trauma comes in many facets, such as people undergoing a number of distressful events during their lifetime. African American women are more likely to experience challenges with anxiety, major depressive disorder, and other psychological issues (Martin, Cromer, DePrince, & Freyd, 2013). According to Arditti (2012), African American women's encounter with the incarceration of their spouses, partners, or mates has been for the most part disregarded.

There is an abundance of literature dedicated to the effects of trauma on children contending with paternal incarceration. When a parent is incarcerated, it may trigger



adverse psychological and emotional responses in children (Murray et al., 2014). The arrest, because more than likely the children are present when it happens, causes shock, anxiety, and trauma. Kampfner's (1995) studied incarcerated mothers and reported that children suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder, including flashbacks of the arrest of their mothers (Murray et al. 2014).

The family suffers from traumatic events in the arrest as well as the trial. These causes are found to be highly traumatic due to "secondary prisonization" (Comfort, 2008, p. 101). Trauma happens to the partner of the incarcerated when they feel abandoned. Depression happens when having to work overtime for extra money is forced upon them. The women may be forlorn and heavily-laden with child care and having to provide and uphold the family due to the incarceration (Comfort, 2008). Gjesfjeld, Greeno, Kim, and Anderson (2010) and Turney (2011) found that these families, when exposed to a long duration of depression, experience an intensity that creates a burden of chronic and proximate depression.

### **Stigma and Shame**

It has been discussed in the literature that isolation and shame are indivisible. Alone, shame generates a kind of self-perpetuating setup of one's own isolation. Should one conceal their feelings because of shame, it generates further shame that generates a further sense of isolation (Braman, 2004). Stigmatization was described in the work of Perry (1973), and in Schwartz's and Weintraub's (1974) results, that prisoner's partners remember that friends and neighbors consider them differently upon learning of their partner's incarceration, looking upon them as if they were also criminals. Koenig and

Gariepy, 1985; Daniel and Barretti; 1981, discovered that several neighbors distinctively recollected a negative response to their partner's transgression. It was one of repugnance, nosiness, shame and terror, and they believed that these responses were transmitted to them. Fishman (1990), and Schneller (1978), go into further detail and are in agreement that the degree to which women encounter stigmatization of some variety or another depends on the neighborhood where they live. Consequently, the stigmatization was not a dilemma for African American families in Schneller's study, particularly in regard to the kind of communities where these families lived and the fact that criminality and incarceration are less likely the traditional lifestyle by neighborhood residents (Fishman, 1990). Fishman's (1990) research supports the findings that female partners who live in crime-familiar neighborhoods are not aware of their stigmatizing circumstances (Schneller, 1978; Schwartz and Weintaub, 1974). Cooke (2007) found that African American women with incarcerated spouses, partners or mates were disadvantaged in every area of healthcare.

Fishman posited (1990) that the challenges of stress for mothers partnered with imprisoned fathers can "diminish the mother's mental status" (Wildeman et al., 2012, p.221). When a male partner is arrested, this is called the primary phase of the criminalization procedure. When they are incarcerated, their identities become that of "prisoner." In this process, the female partner becomes part of the male partners' diminished and disgraced class (Fishman, 1990). Consequently, law enforcement, and prison personnel contribute to the women's opinions of themselves as being prisoners' partners (Fishman, 1990). The female partners in Fishman's (1990) study informed the

researcher that not only did they feel anxiety, but they also felt stigmatization during the arrest of their male partners. The treatment that the female partner felt they received was “discreditable by association” during the arrest of their male spouses, partners or mates (Wildeman et al., 2012, p.220).

### **Criminality by Association**

In the research, it has been discussed that the female herself spouse or partner has had feelings of being criminalized (Black, 2010; Fishman, 1990). Much of the research is not focused on African American women, but on inadequately educated members of cultural and ethnic minority groups that live in neighborhoods of intense poverty, and by the social ties that bind them to their criminal husbands (Turney et al., 2012; Duwe and Clark, 2011). The African American women involved with a loved one that has a criminal background was often stressed by their absence at night when they were not incarcerated (Fishman, 1990).

### **Summary**

The research of understanding the lived experiences of African American women with an incarcerated spouse, partner or mate, is best understood through self-efficacy and the resilience theory. It allows for understanding their reaction to diminishing mental health, psychological, social and physical loss, related to the incarceration of their spouse, partner or mate. Related studies provided insights on how women may be challenged by the incarceration of the spouse, partner, or mate. Schwartz-Soicher et al., (2011), Comfort (2008), and Fishman (1990) found that understanding the lived experienced by African American women in dyadic relations with incarcerated men may cause the affected

person to become anxious with feelings of stress, shame, depression, life dissatisfaction, and trauma (Wildeman, et al, 2012; Wildeman et al., 2011). Furthermore, the affected women may have feelings of despair, denial, acute anxiety, and major depressive disorder that develop (Turney et al., 2012). Additional characteristics that African American women may encounter involve possibilities of desiring to continue connectedness with the incarcerated partner, and as a result, “materialize” psychological connection to the absent partner through memories created prior to incarceration (Braman, 2004, p. 155).

Previous research suggests a connection relating incarceration and marital separation, the stigma linked to “doing time” is what forces couples to separate. Massoglia, Remster, and King (2011) provide insight relative to the dynamic processes of stigma and the shame of African American women by the incarceration and being criminalized along with their partner (Apel, et al, 2010; Fishman, 1990). The risk and hardships, such as emotional and psychological anguish, as well as physical health problems, stigma and shame may be an effect of these relationships (Chaney, 2011). There was no research found regarding the lived experiences of African American women having an incarcerated spouse, partner or mate.

In Chapter 3, I discuss methodology, the role as a researcher, and disclosure of potential conflicts and biases. These topics are explained in detail in the next chapter. I will describe the (a) sampling strategy, (b) the discussion on data collection, (c) data analysis, (d) verification of trustworthiness, and (e) ethical considerations.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

My rationale for the use of a qualitative study approach was to ascertain the lived experiences of African American women during the incarceration of their spouse, partner, or mate. I wanted to understand the reason that while the topic of incarceration has been around for more than 40 years and although there are several theories that help to explain the phenomenon of incarceration and its impact on the mental status of the women affected (Wildeman, 2012), my examination of the literature provided no explanation of the lived experiences of African American women involved with incarcerated spouses, partners, or mates.

In this chapter, I will describe (a) the rationale and research design, (b) the role of the researcher, (c) the interview and research questions, (d) description of participants, (e) description of settings, (f) data collection, (g) data analysis, (h) reliability and validity, (i) data tracking and management, and (j) ethical procedures. These topics are explained in detail in this chapter. They are described in exact terms.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

I developed the following research question to guide this study: What are lived experiences of African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate?

I conducted this phenomenological study to explore the lived experiences of African American women due to the incarceration of their male significant other. I

anticipated that the results of this study would provide clinicians with increased knowledge on the topic of African American women and their lived experiences concerning the incarceration of their spouse, partner, or mate. To gather data for this study, I interviewed African American women residing in a metropolitan northeastern area in the United States.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In phenomenology, the researcher is responsible for the origin, development, and recruitment of participants; accuracy of the interviews; analysis of the data; and writing of the study. As researcher, I bracketed my experiences to control for potential bias and requested that the participants verify the written version of their interviews (Creswell, 2007; Gee, Loewenthal, & Cayne, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). According to the American Psychological Association (2015), the researcher must be competent to perform the research. I made sure that all research participants signed an informed consent form before beginning data collection.

The participants may possibly have previously experienced stigmatization, shame, and degradation with inmates being involved with the criminal justice system (Comfort, 2008; Fishman, 1990). As a researcher, I remained cognizant of harmful stereotypes and labels to the women whose spouses, partners, or mates may have had previous penal involvement (see Cook, 2012). Another responsibility of the researcher is to remain sensitive to the interactions with participants, as well as the creation of the interview questions, to mitigate revictimizing this population, ensure empathic listening, and

establish rapport, respect, and privacy for the respondents and confidentiality (Gubrium et al., 2012).

In this study, I ensured that (a) all precautions were in place to safeguard research subjects against harm according to Institution Review Board (IRB) and American Psychological Association (APA) ethical guidelines; (b) a fair distribution of the burden of the research was addressed by making certain that the participant feels empowered to “tell the story;” and (c) the study was designed with consideration and respect throughout the project. I made every attempt to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. As a researcher, awareness of an individual’s own world views as well as how biases have to be controlled to protect human participants elevates the validity and reduces risking the credibility of the study. An additional potential bias that I controlled for was that I am an African American woman (see Chenail, 2011).

## **Methodology**

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation and Data Collection**

**Setting** The population for this study was women who identified as African American. The geographic setting was Newark, N.J. No second-hand information or telephone interviews were used in the study. The study was open to African American women in New Jersey with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate.

**Participant selection logic** This study was the first attempt to obtain Newark, New Jersey participant views on the lived experiences of African American women with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate. I recruited participants for this study upon receiving Walden University’s Institutional Review Board’s (IRB) approval. It is

recommended that sampling strategies be employed when individuals become *hard-to-reach* (Abrams, 2010). When individuals were deemed hard-to-reach in this study, I employed diverse sampling strategies. I allowed the range of the sample of African American women to exceed a metropolitan city in the northeastern United States to obtain variation of the sample. I purposively sampled African American women who identified themselves with spouses, partners, or mates who were an incarcerated male imprisoned for a year or more. The sample of African American women was comprised of a hard-to-reach population, who may feel threatened, entrapped, and transient (see Abrams, 2010).

Creswell (2009) suggested using between five and 10 participants, while Moustakas (1994) advised that there are no solid rules for choosing research participants. Moustakas stated that some thoughts for choosing participants should include age, race, religion, ethnic, and cultural factors and gender, and political and economic factors. Moustakas further noted that the essential participant selection criteria are:

The research participant has experienced the phenomenon, is intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings, is willing to participate in a lengthy interview and possibly a follow-up interview, grants the investigator the right to videotape the interview, and publish the data in a dissertation and other publications. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 107).

Only African American females were included in the study. I gave the participants in this study an oral prescreening questionnaire and several written forms to prepare for participation in the research, which were derived from models used by



Moustakas (1994). These documents included a Letter to Prospective Participants, an Informed Consent Form, a Research Contract, and a Letter of Appreciation for Participants.

I conducted the sampling in two parts. The participants were offered personal, one-on-one interviews. Each participant will be offered an incentive of bus tickets to accommodate their travel to the interview. The one-on-one interviews were conducted in a public library side room in a metropolitan city in the northeastern United States. The interviews for the participants were from 30 minutes to an hour.

**Instrumentation** According to Creswell (2009, 2007), the researcher is the key instrument for the data collection. The researcher, through examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants, collects the data. Researchers are not dependent upon questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers (Creswell, 2007). This objective is to help the participants feel empowered to tell their story, removing the likelihood for bias and stigma (Fishman, 1990).

The length of time for this data collection process was between 1 to 2 months. I used a semi structured questionnaire for the interview process (see Appendix A). During data collection, subjects called me at the phone number I put on the flyer, and I screened them, as defined on the informed consent. If subjects agreed to participate, they were encouraged to bring mementos and artifacts that were meaningful to them as well as symbolic of their relationship with their incarcerated partner. This form of triangulation served as validation for the research findings (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

I provided the participants with consent forms and asked them to sign the document before the interview took place. At the end of each interview, the participant was debriefed regarding the next phase stage of the data collection. As the researcher, I offered access to community mental health providers and follow-up if needed from the participants.

Once the interviews were complete, I completed the transcriptions as soon as possible. Timely transcription of the notes and interviews helped with recalling information. The data analysis took place immediately following transcription of the data. I used the technique of hearing data through self-reflection as a means of self-evaluation in each interview and to summarize reflective notes and memos (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The memo technique was also used during the data collection process. I used memos to record analytical thoughts as well as salient points regarding data that assisted in augmenting the interview data. The memos were recorded in my password-protected computer and contained ideas, concepts, and theory-related notes regarding the data (see Deady, 2011).

I then compared collected data to the research question to determine that the research question was adequately addressed. The results will become the raw data to be used for coding (Moustakas, 1994). During the initial coding procedure, all words were analyzed, and I created abbreviating codes (see Creswell, 2007).

Using the phenomenological method, I analyzed the raw data interview notes and the notes taken from complex words or expressions that were reflective of the subjects. When the process began, an assignment of codes with key segments was given to the

data. This step was based on my precoding of the data as they aligned with the lived experiences. These categories created the foundation for my theoretical sampling and the development of substantive theory. The data were then coded to the theory, and I identified themes from the data, serving as a means of triangulation as well as an interpretation guide.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

My analysis of the phenomenological data was an inductive procedure, encompassing theme-based coding, analytic note taking, theoretical sampling, reaching a saturation point, ordering and sorting, writing the results, and reflection of the research (Creswell, 2007). I began the phenomenological research design data analysis instantaneously after transcription. In other qualitative analysis, the first data under analysis are the words collected during the interview process.

In order to preserve data integrity, quality, and confidentiality before the analytical process took place, data management was an important procedure to follow. I secured the raw material from interviews, including memos, field notes, tape recordings, and other documents to be coded and labeled, in a safe, procured for this study. The electronic data were retained in a categorical folder with the qualitative software. All of the documents were password protected. The naming conventions had uniquely identifiable documents. The drafts as well as final documents of all types were labeled following a similar protocol. I backed the data up on a USB drive and stored it in the safe. The data will remain in the safe for 5 years from the project completion date, and then destroyed.

The data were be coded using the NVivo software. It allowed me to eliminate any biases and objectively evaluate the data. The NVivo software also allowed me to organize and identify themes in this study. It allowed for emergent and contributing themes of the study.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

To establish credibility for this study, I used various techniques, such as triangulation, saturation, member checking, and journaling (i.e., reflexivity). Triangulation was used by examining evidence from the sources to develop a coherent justification for themes. I also used analytic memos to facilitate validating the interpretations. Furthermore, during the interviews, as key concepts were conveyed by the participants, I conducted member checking by summarizing the respondents' words and then having them verify my summaries.

### **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity can be achieved by recording the researcher's thoughts, and assumptions, using dated analytic memos. This technique was applied to process all thoughts as well as identify any potential biases. Peer reviewer/debriefing was used in this study to enhance the accuracy of the accounts of the participants. This process involves using someone who reviews and ask questions about the study so the account will resonate with people other than the researcher (Creswell, 2009). This strategy adds validity to the account and involves an interpretation other than that of the researcher. It is invested in another person adding validity.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The principal instrument in qualitative research is the researcher. It is crucial that the work of the research maintains ethical standards. This study addressed these issues by determining that, (a) all precautions will be in place to safeguard against harm to research participants according to IRB and APA ethical guidelines; (b) to determine that the participant feels empowered to tell her account, without stigmatization, and (c) the research will be designed with mindfulness of each participant's self-esteem during the project. Privacy as well as confidentiality is hallmark to this study. When there is a potential risk of ethical violations including, privacy breaches; misinterpretation of data, inappropriate interactions with research subjects, biased behavior, as well as absence of academic rigor it will be immediately addressed. The participants' names were placed in a log book containing reference to an exclusive identifier to camouflage their identities for the purpose of possible follow-up.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I explained the rationale for selecting qualitative methodology, using the phenomenological research design approach. My role as researcher was discussed, as well as a delineation of my responsibilities as a researcher. Attention was paid to managing power differentials. I did not want to taint this study by making the participants feel uncomfortable due to any conflicts or biases.

Also, discussed instrumentation and data collection techniques anticipated for this study. Details specific to data management and data interpretation were discussed.

Trustworthiness as well as strategies to achieve verification and ethical considerations and researcher capability was discussed.

In Chapter four, I will discuss the research setting, participant demographics, the data collection process. There were controls that were implemented to ensure trustworthiness. I also discuss the results from participant interviews.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate. I developed the following research question to guide this study: What are lived experiences of African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate?

In Chapter 4, I will provide an overview of the research methodology and insight into the qualitative data collection processes used to examine the research question. In Chapter 4, I will also provide findings yielded in the form of coded themes from investigating the opinions and personal experiences of the participants. The findings will be followed by a conclusion in which I will give a concise review of the information presented in the chapter.

### **Setting**

The research geographic setting for this study was in Newark, N.J. No second-hand information or telephone interviews were used in the study. The participants in the study were African American women in Newark, New Jersey with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate. I conducted face-to-face interviews with participants during the months of August and September 2018. When the participants responded to the fliers, we mutually agreed upon a scheduled interview date and time.

### **Demographics**

I acquired demographic information from each of the 11 participants and had them verify it, except for Participant Alexandrite. All of the participants were residents

of New Jersey when they were interviewed. The demographics included 11 African American women who had an affiliation of 1 year or more with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate with the exception of the one participant that declined to go forward, Alexandrite. These women, who self-identified, met the inclusion criteria of the study and agreed to sign informed consents. The use of pseudonyms allowed me to honor the women by assigning a name rather than a number or an alphabet. Table 1 provides a summary of revealed information.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics Variables*

Participant	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Spouse, Partner or Mate	Number of years in relationship
Garnet	43	African American	Partner	8 yrs.
Amethyst	40	African American	Spouse	9 yrs.
Aquamarine	37	African American	Spouse	10 yrs.
Diamond	45	African American	Spouse	15 yrs.
Emerald	55	African American	Spouse	2 yrs.
Alexandrite	??	African American	??	??
Ruby	33	African American	Mate	4 yrs.
Pexidot	36	African American	Partner	8 yrs.
Sapphire	34	African American	Spouse	11 yrs.
Rose Zircon	39	African American	Spouse	1 yr.
Topaz	32	African American	Partner	18 months

Table 1 provides a demographic breakdown of the 11 participants in this study with an age range between 32 and 55. All of these women identified as African American. These women had a span of 18 months to 15 years in their relationship with a spouse, partner, or mate. Six of the women referred to their incarcerated loved one as their spouse, while three of the women referred to their incarcerated loved one as their partner and one referred to their incarcerated loved one as their mate. One of the women



with an incarcerated loved one preferred not to continue to participate. For confidentiality concerns, I gave each participant a pseudonym of a birthstone to replace their name. During the remainder of the study, I will use the assigned pseudonym when referring to the participant.

### **African American Women with Spouse**

#### **Participant Amethyst.**

##### *Main interview questions.*

Interview Question 1: We were raising our family like any American citizens. I was out running errands one Thursday and I got a call letting me know that my husband had been arrested coming home from work and that he was at the county jail. When he told me what happened I could not believe it. I was not prepared for this and I had to adjust to a new way of life.

Interview Question 2: Yes, the reason that I feel like I need to stay is for love. We promised each other that we would be there for one another forever and no matter what we told each other we would make it work.

##### *Intermediate questions.*

Interview Question 3:

- 3a. I feel empty because he is not there.
- 3b. No, we decided that I will not come to the jail.
- 3c. N/A
- 3d. N/A
- 3e. I had to make adjustments and that was very difficult.

3f.? I would not have had to go back to work and make my kids latch key children.

Interview Question 4: Because I have been shamed to this situation I do not talk to anyone regarding this situation. I still go to church with my children on Sunday. I do not talk to friends, family, or people on the job.

Interview Question 5: I had adjustment disorder and depression, but I knew for my children I had to pick myself up by the boot straps and carry on the family.

5a. Immediately

5b. Almost 2 yrs after the arrest.

5c.? Yes.

5d. Due to the incarceration of my husband.

Interview Question 6: I was totally shamed by this whole situation.

Interview Question 7: I cope by thinking positive of what I learned from church each Sunday.

**Participant Aquamarine.**

***Main interview questions.***

Interview Question 1: Regardless of what you feel like you've done for your husband, it still comes back on you, and you feel like, "Well maybe I did something wrong. Maybe I messed up. You know, maybe if I had done something, then it wouldn't have happened this way." You know I talk to my boss about stuff, but not regarding this. This was too much, and it definitely made, well, it was just harder to talk to her. She wanted to know how my husband was. I

just can't tell it to her. What does she know about prison? When we work late, my boss allowed me to take a taxi, I say, "If you want me to take a taxi you go and flag one for me. I'm not going out there and stand people will see me." I felt like everyone knew what my husband had done and it was my fault.

Interview Question 2: Yes, I married him for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health and we have 3 children.

*Intermediate questions.*

Interview Question 3:

3a. I feel empty and helpless. There must be something that can be done, what does the future look like for my family.

3b. I was so afraid and stressed out, I felt like they were going to keep me there.

3c. Yes, but by far different from television shows.

3d. The COs are different in that they want to challenge you as a visitor. They want to know your business.

3e. I have more of an obligation to him.

3f. My life would not be as financially difficult.

Interview Question 4: I stay away from family functions. I do not go out with friends. I go to church but I go in and come out. Of course I go to work because I need to make money for the family and him.

Interview Question 5: I believe in the whole situation I was and am depressed.

5a. As soon as he was arrested, these feelings occurred.

5b. There were times during this experience that I wanted to be done with my husband.

5c. Yes

5d. Fear of the unknown.

Interview Question 6: I was ashamed of the situation and did not know how to hide. I wanted to take my children and move to another world.

Interview Question 7: I had to really allow God to speak to my heart.

**Participant Diamond.**

***Main interview questions.***

Interview Question 1: We were a family that was great for the first 10 years and he started becoming distant. He started spending more money than I knew we had. He would spend nights and weekends out, saying he had to go on business trips. After a while, he was no longer the man I married, we were no longer friends. He seemed to be living a double life. We could not talk without arguing and I could not get through to him, until the arrest. He revealed to me that he had a fiancé and two other children. I forgave him after a few years and the other woman and children are part of my extended family, but she does not go to see him and doesn't want their children to see him either.

Interview Question 2: No, but I am staying. I feel sorry for him, I know that is not a reason to stay but if I do not forgive him, God will not forgive me.

***Intermediate questions.***

Interview Question 3:

3a. It plays with my mind. Feel crazy now, but before when it first happened, I thought I didn't care about him, I wanted to divorce him. My body would grave him sometimes.

3b. I was stressed when I began going to the prison.

3c. Yes. It is not a good place.

3d. It is deplorable.

3e. I had to step up as disciplinarian and nurturer.

3f. I would not had gone back to school and gotten my degree.

Interview Question 4: I only talk to the other woman, my family, friends, church family and job does not know about this situation.

Interview Question 5: I had anxiety attacks and I was depressed.

5a. In the beginning.

5b. Yes, things changed after I forgave him and the other woman.

5c. No

5d. N/A

Interview Question 6: I was ashamed and still am ashamed. I somehow feel responsible, but I don't know why.

Interview Question 7: I go to church and listen to the preacher.

### **Participant Emerald.**

#### ***Main interview questions.***

Interview Question 1: The lived experience that I have had with my spouse is once he got arrested, it was very depressing. I could not move for the first few

days after the arrest I stayed in bed all of the time and I stopped going anywhere.

I would not talk to anyone except for people that were very close to me that would sympathize with me. I could not sleep and often wondered what I did wrong. I was angry with him. I did not want to talk to him on the phone nor did I want to write him or go see him. I began to try and put him out of my mind. I wanted to divorce him and get rid of his memory, I wanted to throughout his clothes. I wanted to move from where we lived.

Interview Question 2: No. I do not deserve to be unhappy.

***Intermediate questions.***

Interview Question 3:

3a. It feels like he is dead. And now that he has been sentenced it really feels that he has died.

3b. I never visited the prison and do not have any plans to do so.

3c. N/A

3d. N/A

3e. I still have thoughts of, "Why did he do this to me?" "What did I do wrong?"

3f. I would probably be living in another place. I would be working as a teacher somewhere.

Interview Question 4: I cut a lot of friends off because I was ashamed of what happened. My family members and I were at odds. I did not go to church. I did not tell anyone on my job because I thought they would look at me differently.

Interview Question 5: Depression, anxiety, and PTSD believe it or not and I have feelings of the arrest happening over and over again, especially when it comes to rent and bill time. My spouse used to take care of the money part of the household.

5a. The first evening when I learned that my spouse was arrested on his job.

5b. Things changed immediately, I realized that I would have to take over all of the duties that my spouse used to do.

5c. Yes, the process of the arrest. See the arrest at his job was not the first time that there was an encounter with the police. They came to our house before to question us.

5d. I thought I was losing my mind.

Interview Question 6: I felt a lot of shame. I felt like it was me.

Interview Question 7: I started going to church and threw myself into my job.

### **Participant Sapphire.**

#### ***Main interview questions.***

Interview Question 1: Before the arrest, we were a normal every day family, we did everything together. Once he was arrested, he didn't want to talk about the situation. I believe he got depressed because of the situation. I did too but I felt we needed to talk about it but because of him being in jail he didn't want to talk there. He was told by his lawyer not to talk about anything confidential. We are appealing his case.

Interview Question 2: Yes, I believe in my spouse. I do not think he is guilty because he is not that kind of man. I believe that his case is going to be overturned for mistaken identity. It is my plan to stay with him to the end.

***Intermediate questions.***

Interview Question 3:

3a. It was hard to be away from him, I could not sleep because he was not in the bed next to me. It hurts like; I have the flu, my body aches.

3b. Yes, stressful.

3c. No, it is stressful.

3d. Nothing changed, I still feel stressed.

3e. I am a little more independent.

3f. I would not be as independent.

Interview Question 4: I do not talk to anyone about my situation. I keep it all to myself, I just talk to the Lord.

Interview Question 5: Depression, anxiety and PTSD.

5a. From the beginning to end.

5b. Nothing has changed, I still feel the same.

5c. Yes

5d. The arrest and incarceration of my husband caused the thoughts.

Interview Questions 6: I am very much shame, no one will understand what I am going through. I think that everyone will pick on me.

Interview Question 7: I pray and talk to God.



**Participant Rose Zircon.*****Main interview questions.***

Interview Question 1:

This whole situation took a toll on me. I had almost come to the decision of not doing this because this was not his first arrest. Although this was the first time he had been to prison for any length of time.

Interview Question 2: If the shoe was on the other foot, what would I want done for me?

***Intermediate questions.***

Interview Question 3:

3a. It was difficult, I felt empty.

3b. Yes, I would go both Saturday and Sunday. These days would turn out to be 8 hour days.

3c. It is not anything like TV.

3d. The waiting times to get into see your loved one. The length of time it takes to get to the prison. I drive there and it is far.

3e. I would not do it again, when he gets out and if he goes back.

3f. I would not be stressed out and worried about him being alright.

Interview Question 4: It affected my social life because I stayed away from friends. My family was supportive, but they did not like him. I would go to church but not talk to anyone.

Interview Question 5: I had anxiety and depression.

5a. Immediately.

5b. It took a while

5c. Yes, because I was trying to figure out the why the incarceration.

5d. The surprise of his arrest caused these thoughts.

Interview Question 6: I was ashamed that I did not know he was a bad person and that he was involved in illegal activities.

Interview Question 7: I hold on to my faith.

### **African American with Partner**

#### **Participant Garnet.**

##### *Main interview questions.*

Interview Question 1: Well, I have been with him for 8 years and we have a son that was born a year before he went down to prison. We decided that we would not use the phone while he was in prison because it could get too expensive. I had up days and down days, I would be depressed in other words. I was put in this situation by him and almost lost my children because of it. I had to spend a week in jail because of the situation and my sister had to take my other three children. His mother took our son. My oldest son's now deceased father bailed me out of jail. I was going to jail and maybe to prison for the same charges that he had because he was in my house when the police ran-up on him. I believe it was a set-up. The whole situation was stressful, embarrassing and I felt like a disappointment to my family.

Interview Question 2:

Yes, I did not want to turn my back on him. "He was in my heart." We have a son together and I did not want my son without his Father. There were times that I felt like getting out of the situation by not being bothered by him. I thought leaving him but then I thought about my son and how we made promises to one another not to leave each other no matter what happened.

***Intermediate questions.***

Interview Question 3:

3a. It was traumatizing and depressing.

3b. Yes, I was stressed out and nervous and overwhelmed at the same time.

3c. Yes, I see it is designed to tare you down to separate families.

3d. I did not know that the CO's in the prison would offer to take care of you when your partner was in prison.

3e. I have to do everything for the children; there is no one to help me, I am constantly tired and especially when I have to gather my son up by 5:00 am in the morning on a Saturday for visits that may or may not happen.

3f. My time would not be consumed by visiting a prison that may not let me in because my son is wearing the wrong color.

Interview Question 4: I felt like I had a target on my back that everyone knew what happened to me, no one knew except my family. I isolated myself from

everyone. I did not go to church or around family and friends. I had to work in order to make money to support him.

Interview Question 5: PTSD, anxiety, and depression were all the psychological issues I was having.

5a. When I got out of jail because of this situation it started occurring.

5b. About 2 years after this all happened.

5c. Yes

5d. By my thinking of my partner being incarcerated.

Interview Question 6: I had enormous feelings of shame throughout this experience and I still do especially when I am going to the prison during the holidays.

Interview Question 7: I do private work for a woman that has disabilities and I talk to her. I also ride down prison on a bus that takes family members to three different jails and I talk to a couple of the ladies in the same situation I am in.

### **Participant Pexidot.**

#### ***Main interview questions.***

Interview Question 1: We were happy until the police came to our door to talk to us. I had no idea of what was going on, I never had any dealings with the police. I found myself going downtown talking with them and crying because I didn't understand what was going on. I left the jail with an escort for them to come and search my apartment for evidence of a shooting. In 2 hours, my partner comes in the house, telling me he is sorry for putting me through this. It was later that he

was convicted. I do not know if he is guilty, but I do know I have to be there for him.

**Interview Question 2:** No. Yes because I want to be there for him because he has no other family.

***Intermediate questions.***

Interview Question 3:

3a. It is upsetting not to have him by my side at night.

3b. Yes. I was nervous.

3c. Yes.

3d. Prison is nothing like TV.

3e. Yes, I am more self-sufficient. I found that I can do more for myself.

3f. I may not have become more self-sufficient. I am thinking about going back to school to get my GED and maybe go to college.

Interview Question 4: In the beginning of him going to jail I was telling everyone in the neighborhood because it was nothing new for where we are from but when I got the job I was on I didn't talk about it because I thought people would look at me different.

Interview Question 5: I had the feeling I was losing my mind. I was depressed for weeks. I couldn't eat or sleep well.

5a. When he was arrested.

5b. Immediately

5c. Yes, all of them.

5d. My partner's arrest was the reason.

Interview Question 6: I was not shamed by his arrest in the neighborhood but when I got a job, I became ashamed of the situation with him. I never talk about it because I would not want it to affect my job.

Interview Question 7: I talk to him when I go to the jail or write in my journal. Maybe I will write a book about this experience one day. Also, I talk to friends and some family about the situation.

**Participant Topaz.**

***Main interview questions.***

Interview Question 1: We were getting to know each other when he was arrested. I was at the grocery store when my apartment was raided by the police. When I came home, I saw him being lead out of my house in handcuffs. When I was able to go into my house it was all torn up and I still do not have all of my possessions replaced. If I had been in the house, I was told I would have been arrested with him although I had nothing to do with the criminal act that was committed.

Interview Question 2:No.

***Intermediate questions.***

Interview Question 3:

3a. It was difficult, I felt empty.

3b. Yes, I would go both Saturday and Sunday. These days would turn out to be 8 hour days.

3c. It is not anything like TV.

3d. The waiting time to get into see your loved one. The length of time it takes to get to the prison.

3e. I would not do it again.

3f. I would not be stressed out and worried about him being alright.

Interview Question 4: It affected my social life because I stayed away from friends. My family was supportive but they did not like him. I would go to church but not talk to anyone.

Interview Question 5: I had anxiety and depression.

5a. Immediately.

5b. It took a while

5c. Yes, because I was trying to figure out the why the incarceration.

5d The surprise of his arrest caused these thoughts.

Interview Question 6: I was ashamed that I did not know he was a bad person and that he was involved in illegal activities.

Interview Question 7: I hold on to my faith.

### **African American Women with a Mate**

#### **Participant Ruby.**

##### ***Main interview questions.***

Interview Question 1: Since he has been incarcerated, I was not faithful to him because I feel like he abandoned me when he went down prison. He told me before he got caught he was going to stop doing whatever it was he was doing that

was illegal. I could not go to see him in the beginning it hurt too much, I had never been in a jail or prison before and I was scared.

Interview Question 2: At first no, then after he kept calling me I gave in. He convinced me that I should hold him down because before the situation happened he held me down.

***Intermediate questions.***

Interview Question 3:

3a. It hurts. I can't touch him; I have to speak with him through a small window.

3b. I was scared and nervous. I was unsure of how to handle this whole thing.

3c. No because I never thought about it before.

3d. N/A

3e. It is sad, but I need to hang in there with him because after all he took care of me before all of this.

3f. I wouldn't have to be scared every time I have to come to the jail.

Interview Question 4: I told all of my friends, family, I don't go to church and I am on a new job so I don't talk to them about my business.

Interview Question 5: I thought I was going to go crazy. I thought my mind was going because I would dream about him and see him in the house as I was going to sleep.

5a. In the beginning when he first went to jail.



5b. After about two weeks.

5c. Sometimes I would dream about him.

5d. My boyfriend's incarceration is the reason.

Interview Question 6: Yes. I do not mind talking about it to my friends and family but the people that I work with would not understand my boyfriend being in jail. I would be shame for them to know because they would think that I had something to do with it (the crime).

Interview Question 7: I have met ladies on the bus that we travel on to go down prison and we talk about our experiences.

### **African American Women that Declined**

**Participant Alexandrite.** This research is about you as well as your feelings of lived experiences and survival skills, if any, from your partner – to maintain that focus, please do not use any specific details about a crime or criminal event, and do not talk about details of any investigations that may be criminal in nature.

Are you okay to move forward with this interview? **No**

### **Data Collection**

Walden University's IRB approved my data collection procedure on August 7, 2018, (Approval No. 08-07-18-0171065). The data collection for this study consisted of interviews with 10 African American women who have an incarcerated spouse, partner or mate for 1 year or longer using open-ended questions with one decline. The technique of snowballing was used along with the original data collection plan. The snowballing technique involves participants referring to be interviewed (Creswell, 2009). All of these

African American women were over the age of 18, and were still involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner or mate at the time of the interview. This design assured that participants were uninhibited to explain their lived experience as they experienced it and tell their own story. In the data collection process a thorough face-to-face interview was conducted. I recorded information during the interview by using the SL1200 Voice Recorder Pen. A thematic analysis (NVivo) was conducted for emerging themes and to identify commonalities from the participant's replies to the questionnaire.

### **Data Analysis**

Collected data are the replies of each participant to the questions precisely associated to the research question for understanding the lived experience of African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner or mate.

### **NVivo Coding System, Themes and Transcription**

I was able to associate the themes generated by the NVivo coding system. Other techniques for ascertaining credibility are confidence in the truth of the findings posits Lincoln and Guba (1985). The African American women interviewed that shared their stories, and experiences wanted to "tell her story" therefore there are reliability, integrity and trustworthiness in the participant's replies to the questionnaire. The coding system NVivo manufactured by QSR International is an in-depth level data analysis used in qualitative research; it collects and organizes data in volumes of information. Data were transcribed for the participants followed by organizing the themes for the research question by the women and then the data was organized by putting all the women in a large group.

The codes identified in most transcripts are:

1. Coping refers to tactics used to respond to the experience of the incarceration.  
Example: “By thinking positive of what I learned from church each Sunday.”  
“I had to really allow God to speak to my heart.”
2. Depression is identified as specific feelings, and that state, experienced resulted in the defined conduct. Example: “Anxiety and depression were all the psychological issues I was having.”
3. Prison negativity is the thoughts of visiting the facility. Example: “I was so afraid and stressed out, I felt like they were going to keep me there.”
4. Recurring thoughts are identified as thinking of the situation over and over.  
Example: “Yes, because I was trying to figure out the why the incarceration.”
5. Shame is identified as embarrassed by the situation. Example: “I was ashamed that I did not know he was a bad person and that he was involved in illegal activities.”
6. Stay in relationship is identified as continuing being with the incarcerated spouse, partner and mate. Example: “Yes because I want to be there for him because he has no other family.”
7. Step up is identified as changing your role in the household. Example: “She felt obligated to rectify her spouse’s errors.”
8. Stigmatized is identified as feelings of inferiority and shame: Example: “I felt like I had a target on my back that everyone knew what happened to me, no one knew except my family.”

9. Stressed is identified as nervous, pressured, scared, anxious unknowing and afraid. Example: “Yes, I would go both Saturday and Sunday. These days would turn out to be 8 hour days.”
10. Traumatized is identified shocked, upset and disturbed. Example: “It was traumatizing being away from him.”

### **Results**

The remainder of this section documents the women’s answers to the interview questions relative to the research question organized via themes: What are lived experiences of African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner or mate?

#### **Theme 1: Coping in the Lived Experience of Incarceration**

Coping in understanding lived experience of African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner or mate is a difficult task. These women are in crisis and barely able to function regularly. Each participant had the same consensus Amethyst, Aquamarine, Diamond, Emerald, Garnet, Pexidot, Rose Zircon, Ruby, Sapphire and Topaz. Participants Amethyst, Aquamarine, Diamond, Emerald, Rose Zircon, Sapphire and Topaz all agreed that, “I had to really allow God to speak to my heart.” “I go to church and listen to the preacher.” and “I started going to church and through myself into my job.

The other participants Garnet, Pexidot and Ruby talked to others family members or people that were in their same situation. “I ride down prison on a bus that takes family members to three different jails and I talk to a couple of the ladies in the same situation I

am in.” “I have met ladies on the bus that we travel on to go down prison and we talk about our experiences.” “I talk to him when I go to the jail or write in my journal.”

### **Theme 2: Depression in the Incarceration Lived Experience**

African American women that were involved with men that are incarcerated were established to be exceptionally susceptible to mind-sets of depression (Duwe and Clarke, 2013; Wildeman et al., 2012; Apel et al., 2010; Wildeman and Westin, 2010). Insight garnered from the *American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual – 5th edition, (DSM – 5)* gives a plausible explanation for psychological reaction to the mental status, which is inclusive of African American women. The DSM – 5 has been updated and changed regarding clinical depression—now all under depressive disorders, with two new disorders. The DSM – 5 now refers to clinical depression as major depressive disorder, which no longer has the requisite of two weeks in the core criteria of symptoms. Participant’s Amethyst, Aquamarine, Diamond, Garnet, Emerald, Ruby, Topaz, Rose Zircon, Pexidot and Sapphire each experienced depression during this phenomenon. They all described very similar feelings of depression, anxiety or even PTSD. Participant Pexidot’s described, her feeling of depression as, “I had the feeling I was losing my mind. I couldn’t eat or sleep well for weeks.” Another Participant Ruby’s experience was, “I thought I was going to go crazy.” All of the participants were in agreement according to their responses.

### **Theme 3: Prison Negativity in the Incarceration Lived Experience**

The outlook on the way real live prison verses television was across the participants not as it appears. Seven out of 10 participants attend the prison on a regular

basis. They have taken on this task that caused many of them to have to “step-up” financial as well as in every other area of their lives in order to conduct and uphold a family on a daily basis. The described prison negativity as such, “Yes, stressful.” “I was scared and nervous. I was unsure of how to handle this whole thing.” “The waiting times to get into see your loved one. The length of time it takes to get to the prison. I drive there and it is far.” “The CO’s are different in that they want to challenge you as a visitor. They want to know your business.” “I see it is designed to tear you down to separate families.”

The other three participants Topaz, Emerald, and Amethyst did not go to the jail or prison. This is what they said, “I do not have any thoughts because I do not go.” “I never visited the prison and do not have any plans to do so.” “No, we decided that I will not come to the jail.”

#### **Theme 4: Recurring Thoughts in the Incarceration Lived Experiences**

According to Stocks, Lopez-Perez and Ocejia, 2017, posits that recurring thoughts are empathetic concern and distress of a pattern for helping behavior. Indicated in the interviews, many of the participants exhibit this behavior. Pexidot, Ruby, Rose Zircon, Aquamarine, Topaz, Sapphire, Garnet, Emerald, and Amethyst all report having recurring thoughts during the lived experience of the incarceration process. Nine out of 10 reported these thoughts. This is an example of what they said, “Yes, all of them.” “Sometimes I would dream about him.” “Yes, because I was trying to figure out the why the incarceration.” “I thought I was losing my mind.” “Yes.” Participant Diamond was the

only participant that did not have any recurring thoughts. Her reply to this question was an emphatic, “No.”

### **Theme 5: Shame During the Incarceration Lived Experience**

Shame is an attribute that has been given to women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner or mate. Participants identified as such during their interviews. Each one of the participants all concluded that they were shamed of the situation that they were in. These are some examples of what was said by the participants: “I was not shamed by his arrest in the neighborhood but when I got a job, I became ashamed of the situation with him. I never talk about it because I would not want it to affect my job.” “I was ashamed that I did not know he was a bad person and that he was involved in illegal activities.” “Yes. I do not mind talking about it to my friends and family but the people that I work with would not understand my boyfriend being in jail. I would be shame for them to know because they would think that I had something to do with it (the crime).” “I was ashamed of the situation and did not know how to hide. I wanted to take my children and move to another world.” “I was ashamed and still am ashamed. I somehow feel responsible but I don’t know why.” “I was ashamed and still am ashamed. I somehow feel responsible but I don’t know why.”

### **Theme 6: Traumatized During the Incarceration Lived Experience**

All of the participants reported being traumatized during this lived experience. Garnet, Amethyst, Aquamarine, Diamond, Emerald, Topaz, Pexidot, Ruby, Sapphire, and Rose Zircon were traumatized. Comfort posits that trauma occurs when “secondary prisonization” (Comfort, 2008, p.101) happens. Trauma also happens to the partner of

the incarcerated when they feel “*abandoned*”. Ten out of 10 of the participants described much of the same feelings of trauma such as, “It feels like he is dead. And now that he has been sentenced it really feels that he has died.” “It was traumatizing as well as depressing.” “I feel empty and helpless.” “It is upsetting not to have him by my side at night.” “It hurts. I can’t touch him” “I felt empty.”

### **Theme 7: Stay in Relationship During Incarceration**

Nine out of 10 participants made the decision to stay in the relationship with her incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate. Participant Emerald was the only participant that did not stay in the relationship with her incarcerated spouse. Participant Emerald reported, “No. I do not deserve to be unhappy.”

The other participants described staying in the relationship as, “Yes, I married him for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health and we have 3 children.” “If the shoe was on the other foot, what would I want done for me?” “He convinced me that I should hold him down because before the situation happened he held me down.” “Yes, I believe in my spouse. I do not think he is guilty because he is not that kind of man.” “What would I want done for me?” All nine participants had similar reasons for staying in the relationship.

### **Theme 8: Stigma in the Incarceration Experience**

Stigma was described by 7 out of 10 participants as affecting them during the incarceration experience. Amethyst, Aquamarine, Emerald, Garnet, Rose Zircon, Ruby and Topaz described the affects of stigma. There descriptions were, “I felt like I had a



target on my back that everyone knew what happened to me, no one knew except my family.” “Due to the incarceration of my husband.” “What did I do wrong?”

Three participants, Diamond, Pexidot and Sapphire did not report or describe being stigmatized. They described particular feelings such as, “I only talk to the other woman, my family, friends, church family and job does not know about this situation.” “In the beginning of him going to jail I was telling everyone in the neighborhood because it was nothing new for where we are from but when I got the job I was on I didn’t talk about it because I thought people would look at me different.” and “I do not talk to anyone about my situation. I keep it all to myself. I just talk to the Lord.”

### **NVivo Interpretations: All Participants**

The research and interview questions guided the data analysis to create the possession of common attributes within the study. Saturation was reached immediately between participants Garnet and Pexidot. NVivo (a qualitative study coding system) was also used to produce themes and code results. Themes that emerged during data analysis as well as codes that contributed to the themes and representative quotations from each theme, is indicated in the results.

There no discrepant cases, however, there was one participant, Alexandrite, that did not want to continue after the explanation of the study. All of the information obtained was consistent with all of the participating participants. The participants mentioned the following attributes when being involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner or mate.

## **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

For the assurance of trustworthiness in this study, some strategies to verify credibility discussed by Creswell (2009) were used as validation for the quality of the data that was collected. The triangulation strategy was used to validate collected data (Creswell, 2009). Triangulation is the substantiation of specific themes told by participants. Member checking involved each participant's authentication of the precision of the information from the recorded interview and reviewing and comparing peer reviewed published data from numerous sources (Creswell, 2009). It allows the participants the chance to decide if the information is accurate.

### **Member Checking**

At the end of the interviews I conducted member checking. Member checking was done to get feedback of the other participants' responses to the interview questions. Participants being interviewed would comment on the previous participant(s) answers to the interview questions. This technique is the most critical validation of a research study as explained by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The process of member checking requires the participants state their views on the interpretations of findings within the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Member checking gives the participant the chance to decide if the information is accurate. Also, it gives the participants the opportunity to change any details reported. During this procedure, the participants evaluated the data exactness. In the face to face interviews, I conferred the responses in assessment to what the preceding

participant(s) affirmed to make certain that the research study was reliable and legitimate. During member checking all the participants stated that they agreed with the statement.

### **Transferability**

Modification and execution of transferability was not needed for this study. The focus of this study was how lived experiences affect African American women's physical and psychological well-being. The findings of this study are not generalizable to anyone who has not been involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner or mate

### **Dependability**

Creswell (2009) discusses the use of triangulation to make certain the dependability and reliability of a study. The participants in the study reviewed the transcription of their individual interview and were asked to verify the reliability. The participants at this time had the choice to leave out, include or change any information in the transcribed interview. Each participant stated they were satisfied with the prior transcription.

### **Confirmability**

To ensure that my biases did not obstruct the credibility of this study, a journal was utilized to ponder my personal thoughts and feelings concerning the participant's responses throughout the interview. It is my personal as well as professional opinion that all of the participants gave a true account of their lived experience with an incarcerated spouse, partner or mate. I can conclude that my personal bias did not interfere with the credibility of the study.

## **Peer Review**

This study used the validation strategy of peer reviews. The method discussed by Creswell (2009) is the researcher confers with an expert within the same field; in this case it is psychology, confirms or contradicts the quality of the research study. The researcher contacted two colleagues from the dissertation course who completed the qualitative research methods class to examine, evaluate and constructively critique the research portion of this dissertation exploration. Both peer reviewers verified the themes were like those extracted by this researcher. Both peer reviewers made certain the validation of the researcher's study and contributed to the reliability of this study. Both peer reviewers stated that there were no themes disregarded in the study. The validation strategy of peer review discussed by Creswell (2009) is when the researcher confers with an expert in the same field that confirms or contradicts the quality of the research. The researcher utilized two Walden University doctoral clinical psychology candidates at the time that has completed the qualitative research methods class to examine, evaluate and constructively critique the entire exploration of the dissertation. The peer reviewers read through all of the participants responses to the interview questions and agreed with the themes extracted by I and concluded that no themes were excluded from the study. The peer review process made sure that the validation of my qualitative study as well as contributed to the reliability of the research. The peer reviewers articulated that the themes were understandable and constant across the participant's reply. One of the peer reviewers specified that answers were all parallel with what was validated in the study of lived experience of African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse,

partner or mate. According to the research question: What are lived experiences of African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner or mate? Thus, the peer reviewers supported and agreed with the themes generated from this qualitative study.

### **Summary**

This Chapter explores African American women with an incarcerated spouse, partner or mate through the lived experiences of 10 individuals who were involved with this population. The participants were encouraged to use their own words to interpret what they experienced, their challenges, and their effects of their experiences due to the incarceration of their spouse, partner or mate. Many of the events depicted by each of the participants were similar, as were the psychological effects resulting from the events they experienced. Except for the one participant that declined, all acknowledged that she is experiencing some psychological effects and described difficulties she believes are a direct result of this lived experience. Many of the effects reported are consistent with symptoms of depression, anxiety and post traumatic stress disorder. All participants detailed how her life has changed as a result of her lived experience, the difficulties of adjusting to life while her spouse, partner or mate is incarcerated, and her determination to use coping strategies.

In Chapter 5, I will connect the findings of my study with the relevant literature. I will discuss the implications of the results of this study, and discuss how mental health practitioners may apply the findings in helping this population cope with their lived experiences. At the end of this study, there will be suggestions for further research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

In this transcendental phenomenological study, I explored the lived experience of African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate. The purpose and nature of this study was to describe the lived experiences of African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate implementing the self-efficacy theory and the resiliency theory. I sought out African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate to have them tell her story in her words about the incarceration situation. In my analyses of the interview data, I identified several key findings: (a) some participants reported experiencing depression, shame, and stigmatization that they believed are the results of their spouse, partner, or mate being incarcerated and (b) the lived experiences that altered their lives causing them to have to step up, having recurring thoughts, and stay in the incarceration situation. These key findings reinforced the importance of examining this phenomenon from the perspective of the lived experiences of African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate. Exploring the lived experiences of these women from their perspective provided an enhanced understanding of their lived experiences on an everyday foundation, how they explained their feelings regarding their experiences, how they coped with certain situations, and how these experiences affected them.

In this chapter, I will explain the significant findings that materialized in the study and compare the findings to those of the literature review in Chapter 2. This chapter will also include a summary of the results, a discussion of the limitations of the study,

recommendations, and clinical implications of the findings of the study. The implications for future research are also explained in this chapter.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The literature I reviewed in Chapter 2 centered on African American women and their mental status, trauma, stigma and shame, and criminality by association by being involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate. My analysis of the data from this study suggested that there are psychological implications that these women encounter during their lived experiences of incarceration of the spouse, partner, or mate. Comfort (2008) posited that the incarceration process causes depression. Schwartz-Soicher et al. (2011) found that the social stigma connected to the illegal activities of the incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate diminishes the mental status of these women. All participants in this study reported being affected by their lived experience of an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate. Even participants who were not in a long-term relationship with their spouse, partner, or mate reported being affected. My analyses of the data found that lived experiences, such as depression, stigma, recurring thoughts, shame, and trauma, developed during the incarceration of their spouse, partner, or mate. Participants believed that the results were the effect of their spouse, partner, or mate incarceration relative to recurring thoughts and trauma. The literature in Chapter 2 indicated that Bowlby (1979) and Wildeman et al. (2012) noted that emotions related to depression were an effect of longing for the absent spouse, partner, or mate. Nine participants reported depression at various times during their experience.

Most of the participants reported anxiety disorder, depression, trauma, stigma and shame, and criminality by association comparative to staying in the relationship. The most common lived experience participants reported were of stigmatization. There was a stigma attached to them by the system due to their relationship to the spouse, partner, or mate. Their families, friends, and coworkers responded to the incarceration of the spouse, partner, or mate as a disaster or crisis situation as Fishman (1990) posited. Some of the women indicated that friends and neighbors were unlikely to know how to respond. Their friends were more likely to be supportive while neighbors withdrew.

Research indicated that these African American women become severely stressed which leads to trauma (Arditti, 2012). Several of the women interviewed talked about the traumatic experiences that they went through during this situation. Some of the participants indicated that being connected to the criminal justice system strengthens the potential for trauma. Arditti (2012) suggested that unlike other contexts of loss, such as death or illness, loss of a spouse, partner, or mate due to incarceration hardly ever elicits sympathy or support from others, forcing these women to face the difficulties of separation alone (Bowlby, 1979). All participants reported being affected in some way by the incarceration of their spouse, partner, or mate and it seldom eliciting sympathy or support from family or friends, making them face this separation alone.

Resilience theory and self-efficacy theory was the lens that I used to analyze data (see Bandura, 1986; van Wormer et al., 2011). Resilience and self-efficacy theories posit how people control their self-determined judgments and resulting actions (Bandura, 1986). Human cognitive processes rely on the ability to develop conclusions regarding



current situations while at the same time providing an explanation for past experiences (Bandura, 1989). All of the participants reported experiencing depression, trauma, stigma and shame, and criminality by association, which then was used for the coping explained by Bandura's theories of self-efficacy and resilience.

### **Limitations of the Study**

It was my intent to interview between five to 10 participants, and the outcome would not have been much different with a higher number of participants. I decided to interview 10 participants in a metropolitan city in the northeastern United States with the intent of interviewing more; however, I was unable to recruit the participant, Alexandrite. The participant did not want to participate after further explanation of the study, it was too emotionally upsetting.

According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), in the interviewing technique, the researcher should not use meddling questions to develop an empathetic relationship and to be honest with the population because of their potential for paranoia. The phenomenological design was not a limitation; it provided avenues for the participants to tell their stories.

I had expected that there would be participants in the younger age range. The average age of the 10 participants was 45 years old. I had to assist several of the participants in explaining the interview questions without influencing their responses. The anticipated sample was small as well as being taken from a hard-to-reach population, which posed difficulties, such as not reaching a wider participant pool.

## **Recommendations**

In this study, I did not exhaust all aspects of understanding the lived experiences of African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate. Several issues were not covered in this study that warrant further examination. One major recommendation that might be helpful for further exploration is the role of the prison system itself supporting the women that visit the prison population. This may eliminate the stigmatization of the women involved with the spouse, partner, or mate. A study of this topic would be beneficial in understanding the population of women that stay with the incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate. The information would be helpful in assisting prison interns (i.e., psychologists, counselors, and social workers) with preparing these women in orientation for what to expect when visiting the prison.

There have been studies directly focused on the coping strategies of the women that continue to uphold these men that are sent to prison, some of them men incarcerated numerous times. Detailed descriptions in the words of the women that visit the spouse, partner, or mate reported experiencing ridicule and long wait times getting into the prison during the incarceration of their loved one. They may develop depression, shame, and recurring thoughts during the incarceration experience and with self-efficacy and resilience theory will gain coping strategies.

One other area that warrants further study is whether the African American women should seek professional services during this lived experience. It would be helpful if mental health professionals were aware and trained to identify any issues that these women encounter during the incarceration experience. This information may be an

invaluable contribution in explaining whether the women are potentially affected by the incarceration of their spouse, partner, or mate.

## **Implications**

### **Positive Social Change**

The implications for positive social change as a result of this study are if mental health professionals were knowledgeable as well as trained to identify the potential lived experiences of African American women that are involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate, a tailored assessment and treatment could be applied during and after the lived experience with the hope that issues that impede successful coping strategies could be avoided. The coping strategies for African American women can be altered with self-efficacy and resilience (Bandura, 1989). Mental health professionals need to be aware of and able to recognize symptoms and how to use the appropriate treatments.

### **Methodological Implications**

A qualitative phenomenological study was the best way to elicit the lived experience of the African American women involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner, or mate. In this study, the participants, in their own words, explained this particular experience that had lived through. I was able to recruit these individuals by snowball sampling and going out near a jail and half-way house passing out flyers. A couple of the participants referred African American women who they felt would make significantly advantageous contributions to this study.

## Conclusion

Psychological changes have been found to affect an incarcerated male that is a spouse, partner, or mate of African American woman (Comfort, 2008). The potential for psychological effects on African American women “doing time” with their spouse, partner, or mate is a lived experience inclusive of depression, shame, recurring thoughts, trauma, stress, and stigma. These African American women feel that they are obligated to stay in the relationship although they are traumatized. They feel that they should cope and step-up for their family regardless of prison negativity. The awareness of the effects of the psychological experiences on the African American women are significant factors necessary to supporting the women in finding and choosing self-efficacy and resilience as coping mechanisms. Individuals may not be aware of what the incarceration of a spouse, partner, or mate involves and may not be aware of the lived experience African American women may have as a challenge during the incarceration situation. Many individuals may not be conscious that an African American woman is harshly affected and is unable to adjust to society’s stigma and shame toward them. Thereby, these women may need some mental health assistance and the public should be educated of this dilemma.

As a result of this study, I hope that more mental health providers, as well as those who encounter African American women, become more aware of their lived experiences and directly provide service for them. With expanded awareness in recognizing and identifying the lived experience of being involved with an incarcerated spouse, partner or mate, treatments that may assist the women and provide a more successful experience can be developed and implemented.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

**Occurrences of lived Experiences of  
African American Women with an Incarcerated Spouse, Partner, or Mate**

**To the Participant:** This research is about you as well as your feelings of lived experiences and survival skills, if any, from your partner – to maintain that focus, please do not use any specific details about a crime or criminal event, and do not talk about details of any investigations that may be criminal in nature.

- a.) Are you okay to move forward with this interview? If appropriate, today, we are here to talk about your lived experiences while you are away from your partners. Some people refer to their relationships differently. Some women may refer to their partner as their mate, boyfriend, significant other, husband, spouse, or use many other descriptions. Could you tell me how you would categorize your relationship? Could you tell me how long you have been in the relationship with your partner, before incarceration?
- b.) Could you share how often you interact with your spouse, partner or mate meaning in person, letter, by phone, etc.?
- c.) Please tell me how, if at all, that you communicate with him?
- d.) May I ask how long your spouse, partner or mate has been in prison?
- e.) Could you tell me what you think is special about your relationship? Could you describe what drew you into the relationship or what you admired about your spouse, partner or mate?

- f.) Now, may I ask what role your partner played in the relationship prior to his going to prison (i.e. father, part of the household, boyfriend, significant other)?

### **Main Interview Questions**

1. IQ01: If you feel comfortable, could you share what lived experiences you have had with your spouse, partner or mate means to you? Please provide in detail.
2. IQ 02: Sometimes events in our lives cannot be helped when they are negative. Therefore, if the situation is negative, do you believe you should stay in the negative relationship? If yes, why?

### **Intermediate Questions**

3. IQ03: It is possible that life may or may not change for the woman who is physically apart from their incarcerated spouse, partner or mate. Sometimes lived experiences are for the good ----- sometimes for the bad. I am interested in knowing about each of these experiences that you feel comfortable sharing.
  - 3a. Could you describe what it means to be physically away from your partner?
  - 3b. Some individuals experience stress when doing something for the first time.  
  
Could you tell me if you have visited the prison and if so, how it felt going the first time?
  - 3c. Have any thoughts about prison changed?

- 3d. What, if anything was the most important change?
- 3e. How, if at all, have you changed since the incarceration of your loved one?
- 3f. Please tell me how, if at all, your life may be different, if your mate was not in prison?
4. IQ04: Now please tell me how, if at all, your experiences of having your partner incarcerated, affected you *socially* (i.e. friendships, family, church, job).
5. IQ05: The next question is related to your personal feelings of lived experiences. As you think about your feelings about loss and what it means to you, if you feel okay sharing, how has this lived experience affected your state of mind (*psychological*) or your thoughts, in general?
- 5a. Try to recall when, if at all, did you first notice these feelings of the incarceration lived experiences occurred?
- 5b. Could you also describe when and if things changed?
- 5c. During that time, were any thoughts, recurring?
- 5d. What do you think caused these thoughts?
6. IQ06: Finally, in your own words, could you describe, what, if any feelings of shame, you may have felt from this experience of this lived experience from your spouse, partner or mate?
7. IQ07: Could you tell me how you cope with these lived experiences from your spouse, partner or mate?

### **Closing Questions**

1. Please tell me how, if at all do you think your life would be different if your partner was never incarcerated?
2. Is there anything you would like to ask me?
3. Are there any questions that you wish that I had asked?

### **Closing out the Interview/Debrief (Script):**

Discuss next steps (e.g. the data will be transcribed, and participants will be contacted if she chooses to answer follow-up questions if needed).

- Explain Confidentiality
- Read and clarify referral list provided at the beginning of the interview to ensure understanding
- Point out contact information on the informed consent form for the researcher and University in case follow-up is needed.
- Discuss what happens to the research report
- Thank the participants, if appropriate, receive follow-up information, and release her
- Check the recorders immediately. Mark/label the tapes
- Write down any follow-up notes

## Appendix D: Emergent Themes, Codes Contributing to Themes, and Representative

## Quotations from Themes

Theme	Codes contributing to theme	Representative quotations
Theme 1: <b>Coping</b>	Coping refers to tactics used to respond to the experience of the incarceration.	“By thinking positive of what I learned from church each Sunday.” “I had to really allow God to speak to my heart.” Participant Amethyst, Participant Aquamarine
Theme 2: <b>Depression</b>	Depression is identified as specific feelings, and that state, experienced resulted in the defined conduct.	“Anxiety and depression were all the psychological issues I was having.” Participant Diamond
Theme 3: <b>Prison negativity</b>	Prison negativity is the thoughts of visiting the facility.	“I was so afraid and stressed out, I felt like they were going to keep me there.” All participants
Theme 4: <b>Recurring Thoughts</b>	Recurring thoughts are identified as thinking of the situation over and over.	“Yes, because I was trying to figure out why the incarceration?” Participant Rose Zircon
Theme 5: <b>Shame</b>	Shame is identified as embarrassed by the situation.	“I was ashamed that I did not know he was a bad person and that he was involved in illegal activities.” Participant Topaz
Theme 6: <b>Stay in relationship</b>	Stay in relationship is identified as continuing being with the incarcerated spouse, partner and mate.	“Yes because I want to be there for him because he has no other family.” Participant Pexidot
Theme 7: <b>Set up</b>	Step up is identified as changing your role in the household.	[She] feels obligated to rectify her spouse’s errors.
Theme 8: <b>Stigmatized</b>	Stigmatized is identified as feelings of inferiority	“I felt like I had a target on my back that everyone knew what happened to me, no one knew except my family.” Participant

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	and shame.	Garnet
Theme 9: <b>Stress</b>	Stressed is identified as nervous, pressure, scared, anxious unknowing and afraid.	“Yes, I would go both Saturday and Sunday. These days would turn out to be 8 hour days.” Participant Rose Zircon
Theme 10: <b>Traumatized</b>	Traumatized is identified shocked, upset and disturbed.	“It was traumatizing being away from him.” Participant

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