

**Formerly Incarcerated African American Women:
Reclaiming Parenting and Re-Forming Maternal Identities**

BY

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DISSERTATION

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DEFINITIONS

Black Feminist Epistemology—(Hill-Collins, 2000) refers to the conceptual lens for examining race, gender and class oppression. The experiences of Black women are at the center of the analysis.

Comfort with the role of parenting—The participant's description about what made them prepared to take on /resume the role of parenting.

Coparenting—Describes the shared responsibilities of parenting whether cohabitating or not. Also describes multigenerational extended kinship system where grandmothers or other relatives assume responsibilities for children when parents are absent (Strozier, Armstrong, Skuza, Cecil, & McHale. 2011).

Decision for caregiving—Refers to how the mother made the decision about who would care for her child(ren) during the period of incarceration.

Describing parenthood—Participants' descriptions of parenthood in general.

Desires for children—Participants' expressions of what desires they have for their children.

Desires for self—Participants' expressed desires, wishes and aspirations.

Dream of being what type of parent—Description of the parent's original dreams/wishes for themselves about what type of parent they would be (imagined maternal self).

Encouragement from children—Participants expressions about how their children have encouraged them.

History of Abuse and Loss—Participants' expressions about their history of abuse and loss.

Loss—Expressions around either a sense of loss or the actual experience of loss (of a loved one, of parental authority, any type of loss).

Maintaining contact while incarcerated—Describes the types and frequencies of the contacts mothers had with their child(ren) during their incarceration.

Maternal identity—Participants' view of self as "mother"—maternal image.

Most helpful—since release - reflects the participant's description of what things have been most helpful to her since her release from prison.

Parent Role—described by participants - participants' description of parenting - in general.

Parenting—coping with the separation - Participants' expressions about how they coped/managed the separation from their children.

Parenting esteem— Participants' expressions of their esteem related to who they are as a parent. The self-evaluation of themselves as a parent.

Protective parenting—despite drug use - Participants who despite their active drug use took measures to ensure their child(ren)'s safety during their drug use.

Relational Support—Relational support is defined by Proulx, Helms, Milardo and Payne (2009) as the receipt of affirmation, opportunity for discussion, and material assistance in parenting or personal relationships.

Relationship between child and family caregiver - prior to prison - Participants' expressions about the type of relationship the child and the child's family caregiver had - prior to prison.

Relationship with child(ren)'s family caregiver—prior to prison—Participants' expressions about their relationship the child's family caregiver - prior to prison.

Relationship with child(ren)'s family caregiver—since release—Participants' expressions about their relationship the child's family caregiver - since release.

Relationship with child(ren)—prior to prison—Participants' expressions about their relationship with their child - prior to prison.

Relationship with child(ren)—since release—Participants' expressions about their relationship with their child - since release.

Responsibilities, tasks, & commitments of parent role—Participants' descriptions about the responsibilities, tasks, and commitments of the parenting role.

Support—from children, unconditional love & acceptance— the mother's experience with her children post incarceration and her perceptions of their unconditional love and acceptance.

Support—general—Assistance given to the formerly incarcerated woman in any form (including but not limited to material goods, housing, programs, emotional support, etc.).

Support—program—Assistance provided to the formerly incarcerated mother through a formal program whether while in prison (parenting program, pre-release services, or reentry services).

Parenting Transition—refers to the processes of transitioning back into their parenting role, resuming parenting authoritative role, resuming the caretaking role for the child, etc.

What was it like to do this interview—Participants' responses to the question - what was it like to do this interview? Participants' described their level of ease and/or discomfort with the interview itself.

SUMMARY

A study examining the experiences of formerly incarcerated African American women was carried out using qualitative methods. Interviews were conducted with 12 formerly incarcerated African American mothers about their attempts to reconnect to the parenting role, to learn about their maternal reformation and the role of coparenting and relational support. Information on demographics such as current living arrangement, income, and the number of children they have and the length of time incarcerated was collected.

The participants had similar and varied experiences. All of the women in this study made attempts to reconnect to parenting and all but one were successful. Many of the women participating in this study had experienced past abuse which appears to be consistent with the literature on incarcerated women of color. Despite experiencing past abuse, substance abuse and incarceration, most of the mothers expressed having a strong sense of parenting esteem. The mothers felt good about who they were as parents and conveyed a fluid sense of maternal identity which did not require a reformation.

In addition, the mothers reported having good relationships with their children and kin caregivers as well as strong relational and programmatic support. Some of the mothers were in coparenting relationships which provided support for them during their resumption of parenting duties. Many of the mothers participated in programs which gave them the support they needed as they resumed parenting. The mothers demonstrated awareness that the transition to parenting is a process. They acknowledged the role of relational support in their coparenting relationships as helpful to them as they re-acclimated to the parenting role.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

In the past few decades (1980 – 2010), the United States realized a dramatic rise (646%) in the incarceration of women. The overall rate of women involved in the criminal legal system has continued to outpace that of men (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Greene & Mauer, 2010; Sabol, Couture, & Harrison, 2007). The Women’s Prison Association estimate that between 1977 and 2001 the rate of increase surpassed men by 1.5 times each year (WPA Focus on Women & Justice, 2003). The trend over the past 30 years has demonstrated a significant growth in the number of women negatively impacted by the criminal legal system. The number of incarcerated African American women nationally is considerable. “In 2000, [African American] women were incarcerated at six times the rate of White women. This ratio declined by 2009 to nearly three African American women to every one White woman who is incarcerated” (respectively 2.8:1 ratio; Mauer, 2013, p. 1).

More recent figures suggest there is an actual decline in the numbers of African American women who are incarcerated. Nonetheless, African American women remain disproportionately affected by incarceration relative to the proportion of African American women in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Scholars are beginning to analyze this shift in the racial dynamics of women’s incarceration (Mauer, 2013). The recent decline in the numbers of incarcerated African American women may be attributable to changes in sentencing policies and the illumination of racial disparities in incarceration rates of African American women. According to O’Brien (2012), the reduction of sentencing disparities is in part due to the Fair

Sentencing Act, passed in August of 2010. In addition, Greene and Mauer (2010) attribute the downsizing of the prison population to a reduction in crime rates, as well as special initiatives geared toward prevention, reentry support, and reduced technical violations of parole. Despite the recent decline in incarceration, the result of prior years of mass incarceration of African American mothers warrants attention as many women are exiting the prison system.

Accordingly, the increase in the numbers of incarcerated women has significantly affected families. As many as 70% of incarcerated women are parents of children under the age of 18, of whom many will reconnect or attempt to reconnect with children, spouses/partners, former spouses/partners, and families after being released from prison (Arditti & Few, 2006; Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Covington, 2001; Greenfield & Snell, 1999; Mumola, 2000; Pollock, 1998). The majority of these women will return home to reestablish parenting relationships and routines that have been interrupted by their incarceration. The increase in incarceration for women causes both brief and long term separation from families. As noted by Brown and Bloom (2009), many women lose their sense of [parental identity] and experience a great deal of guilt and shame. Brown and Bloom further indicate that the forced separation of imprisonment is tough for mothers to overcome. Formerly incarcerated mothers are subject to the opinions of relatives and children regarding their worthiness of returning to their maternal status.

This study's purpose is to explore the experiences of formerly incarcerated African American mothers' processes of resuming the parent role and the reformation of their maternal identity. Maternal identity may be influenced by the opinions and attitudes of the women's immediate family members who may be caring for these women's children while they are

incarcerated. According to Brown and Bloom (2009), the formerly incarcerated mother attempting to reclaim her parenting role may be influenced by her family caregiver's opinion of her worthiness. They also note that women who are parents not only negotiate reentry after their release from prison, but also renegotiate the terms and conditions of their relations with their children. Gaining a better understanding of the reformation of parental identity and the reclamation of the parenting role may help to enhance the services offered to formerly incarcerated women and their families. Understanding more about the formerly incarcerated mother's reclamation of parenting and reformation of maternal identity may help to develop informed practices that promote the stabilization of formerly incarcerated women, their families, and their communities.

Brown and Bloom (2009) focused their research on the importance of situating women's past struggles as parents and parenting roles as they reentered the community. The mother's parental identity and the reconnection to the parenting role require further exploration. For the purpose of my study, I sought to examine the reclamation of the parenting role and the reformation of maternal identity for the formerly incarcerated mother as a recursive process that is influenced by the relational space between the formerly incarcerated mother and her child's family caregiver.

For the purpose of this study, the reclamation of the parenting role refers to the processes of transferring parental duties, responsibilities, and care of the child(ren) from the family caregiver to the biological mother. Further, Brown and Bloom (2009) found that formerly incarcerated mothers confront many of the same problems they faced prior to imprisonment

including poverty; inadequate education; unstable housing; and insufficient access to social services, employment, and treatment related to addiction. Henriques and Manatu-Rupert (2001) reviewed the literature to examine the issues leading to the incarceration of African American women. They identified several key issues such as substance abuse, sexual abuse, fractured familial relations, and abusive intimate relationships. Henriques and Manatu-Rupert further highlight how social factors contravene African American women's attempts to engage in mainstream traditional roles contributing to their social exclusion in American society.

Social factors that interfere with African American women's attempts to engage in mainstream traditional roles are sometimes the by-products of prior unresolved trauma. A number of studies document the array of traumatic events African American women experience prior to incarceration; these events include disproportionately higher rates of sexual and physical abuse (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1992; Richie, 1996; Snell, 1994). Up to 73% of incarcerated African American women report a history of physical or sexual abuse (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1992). Additionally, Richie's 1996 study found that many African American women inmates had suffered sexual abuse in their intimate relationships. Women's struggles to situate themselves in traditional relationships, as well as their history of trauma, has contributed to their tolerance of less than desirable treatment in their intimate relations. According to Henriques and Manatu-Rupert (2001), the failed attempts to secure the mainstream role for their lives lead many poor African American women into unhealthy intimate partnerships.

Further, the intersection of gender, race/ethnicity, and violence creates an "effective system of organizing African American battered women's behavior into patterns that leaves them

vulnerable to private and public subordination, to violence in their intimate relationships and, in turn, to participation in illegal activities” (Richie, 1996, p. 4). Richie describes this vulnerability as gender entrapment and writes that because African American women experience gender entrapment, they have assumed more subordinate roles. Unstable relationships and other social disenfranchisements add to the complex intersectionality of race, class, and gender. According to Crenshaw (1991), women’s experiences need examining within the intersecting contexts of race, class, and gender.

Few (2007) describes intersectionality in terms of a matrix. According to Few, the intersectionality matrix refers to “a specific location where multiple systems of oppression simultaneously corroborate and subjugate to conceal deliberate, marginalizing ideological maneuvers that define ‘Otherness’ ” (p. 454). Crenshaw’s seminal work on intersectionality takes into account women’s impoverishment, gender oppression, and class status as manifestations of their subordinated experiences. By Crenshaw’s description, intersectional subordination does not have to be intentionally produced. Vulnerabilities that already exist may, in fact, interact with new burdens to produce another dimension of disempowerment. According to Crenshaw, minority women suffer from the effects of multiple types of subordination. Many formerly incarcerated African American women’s experiences of subordination are a result of living in impoverished communities, being the victims of violence, and being gendered female in a male dominated world that judges their criminality as abhorrent female behavior.

According to Mumola (2000), 70% of incarcerated women are parents of at least

one minor-aged child. By 2007, the number of mothers in state and federal prisons increased by 122% since 1991, as compared to the number of fathers that increased by 77% during the same period (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Many incarcerated mothers have children that are cared for by a variety of caregiver types. According to Glaze and Maruschak, 42.1% are grandmothers; 12.0% are grandfathers; 22.8% are other relatives; 10.9% are foster homes or agency placements; and another 7.8% are comprised of friends or others. Overall, family caregivers represent the largest group caring for the child or children of an incarcerated mother.

Historically, African American families provide extensive family support. According to Scannapieco and Jackson (1996), the goals of kinship care have been survival and family preservation. Nevertheless, this type of family support has lessened with the changing roles of family members in current contemporary times (Ruiz, 2002).

The family caregiver is also referred to as the “kinship caregiver,” a term resulting from research conducted by Stack (1974) of network systems in African American communities. According to Bell (2008), scholars later coined “kinship care” to recognize the large number of extended families who care for other children or relative’s children. Children may be cared for in either *informal kinship care* or *formal kinship care* arrangements. Informal kinship care involves agreements made between family members without the involvement of the public child welfare system or the courts (Gibson & Singh, 2010). Formal kinship care involves an arrangement of care, inclusive of government/child welfare system involvement with legal authority and rights given to the relative caregiver (Bell, 2008; Gibson & Singh, 2010; Kroll, 2007). Whether the caregiving role is formal or informal, it presents many challenges to the relative caregiver.

Gleeson, Strozier, and Littlewood (2011), described multigenerational families where at least one child lives in the home of a relative while the parent(s) maintain some type of parental involvement. These types of living arrangements and coparenting relationships form for a number of reasons. In an earlier study, Gleeson, Wesley, Ellis, Seryak, Talley, and Robinson (2009) examined the main motivating factors for taking on the role of kinship caregiver. Some of the reasons were: (1) “to keep the children with the family and out of the foster care system; (2) to keep the children safe, ensure their [sense of] well-being, [and sense of belonging]; (3) out of an obligation and desire to maintain a family legacy; (4) for love; and (5) for spiritual reasons” (p. 306). Relative caregivers became a factor by default or as a result of the parents asking, another relative asking, the system making a request, or a complex mixture of reasons. In addition, parents were unable to care for their children for reasons such as substance abuse, abandonment, incarceration, mental illness, death, divorce, or homelessness.

Other researchers have noted the issues of a parent’s inability to care for children, financial need, divorce, or the inability to care for children because of the parents’ work or school responsibilities as reasons for relative caregiving (Goodman & Silverstein, 2002). Gleeson and colleagues (2009) examined prior research and found that parental incarceration was a significant motivating factor for 18% of informal kinship caregivers in their convenience sample. Furthermore, parental incarceration was often associated with drug use, drug sales, and other committed crimes involving drugs. For some relative caregivers, care for the child begins long before actual incarceration to protect the children from a lack of parental supervision and exposure to drug use and sales.

No matter the motivation to care for a relative's child, caregivers experience stress and often face numerous obstacles. Many experts agree that a lack of legal rights for relative caregivers is a major obstacle in informal kinship care (Gibson & Singh, 2010; Kroll, 2007; Letiecq, Bailey, & Porterfield, 2008). Moreover, reports indicate that grandmothers who are caregivers for their incarcerated daughter's children experience high levels of stress. The caregiving arrangement presents a toll for the caregiver and frequently triggers clinically significant stress levels as difficulties arise as a result of this caregiving (Daly & Glenwick, 2000; Mackintosh, Myers & Kennon, 2006). According to Hanlon, Carswell, and Rose (2007), providing surrogate care may be problematic—especially for grandmothers. Grandmothers are in need of external support, are often found to be infirmed, are barely able to provide for themselves financially, and take on the responsibility for rearing a second generation of children during their parents' absence. Grandparents experience a wide variety of problems when faced with caregiving. Many grandparents live in poverty and/or become financially stressed. Some grandparents are forced to stretch their already fragile budgets, quit their jobs, reduce their work hours, or exhaust their savings to assume the caregiving role for their grandchildren when their mother has been incarcerated (Hanlon, Carswell, & Rose, 2007). In addition, the literature indicates that grandparents experience depression at high rates as well as a variety of health related problems (Burton, 1992; Dowdell, 1995; Minkler, Fuller-Thomsen, & Miller, 1997).

Further, a variety of social ills have been associated with the stress of grandparents raising grandchildren such as social isolation, alienation, low social support, and a reluctance to seek help (Jendrek, 1994). In addition, grandparents may feel guilt or shame associated with their

adult child's inability to care for her own children. Social isolation, alienation, and low social support may increase caregivers' sense of social stigma as well.

This study focuses on the narratives of African American women post-incarceration to learn about their identity reformation and the reclamation of the parenting role between the formerly incarcerated mother and her children's family caregiver. Since many incarcerated women attempt to reestablish parenting relationships, examining this within the context of identity adds to the literature by describing the nuanced experiences of reentry. Studying more about the reclamation of parenting as a relational process between the formerly incarcerated mother and the family caregiver is important to understand, especially as it relates to the formerly incarcerated woman's sense of identity reformation.

B. Significance of the Problem

The dramatic increasing rate of women's incarceration has been staggering and its implications for family life and parenting have yet to be fully realized. When mothers are imprisoned, a forced separation occurs in leaving children behind, which changes the dynamics in families and communities. It is important to examine a myriad of aspects of women's reentry, including the formerly incarcerated mother's return to parenting.

The numbers of incarcerated women in Illinois has increased over the past few decades. In Illinois, the numbers of incarcerated women rose from less than 1,000 in 1980 to 1,183 in 1990; to 2,819 in 2000, and to 2,922 in 2010 (Guerino, Harrison, & Sabol, 2011; Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, 2010). The number of incarcerated African American women nearly doubled from 726 in 1990 to 1,386 in 2010 while numbers for White women rose from 401 in

1990 to 1,273 in 2010. The number of Hispanic women rose from 51 in 1990 to 203 in 2010; for Asian women and “Other” the actual number of increase is unknown since these numbers were not reported in 1990. Overall, African American women have been overrepresented within Illinois’ prison system as well as across the nation (Guerino, Harrison, & Sabol, 2011; Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, 2010). In a report prepared for the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, Olson, Escobar and Stalans (2011) indicate that the Illinois prison system has seen a decrease of Black females sentenced to prison from 70% during the late 1990s to almost 50% in 2011 underlining a dramatic change over time.

The majority of incarcerated women are imprisoned for drug possession (Stevenson, 2011) rather than drug distribution. According to Stevenson (2011) there is “growing evidence that drug treatment and counseling programs are far more effective in reducing drug addiction and abuse than is incarceration” (p. 2). This clearly illustrates the need for more drug treatment programs for this growing population.

In Illinois, more than 60% of all offenders self-reported they have one or more children: 20.4% reported they had 1 child, 17.4% reported they have 2 children, 11.5% reported they have 3 children, and 14.3% reported they have 4 or more children. At least 50% of incarcerated mothers have children under age 5 (Illinois Department of Corrections Annual Report, 2010).

The literature on incarcerated mothers is replete with studies about the effects of parental incarceration on children, caretaking of children with incarcerated parents, stress on incarcerated mothers, and visitation issues of incarcerated women and their children (Hanlon, Carwell, & Rose, 2007; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Tuerk & Loper, 2006; White, Galietta, & Escobar,

2006). The literature examined the effectiveness of parenting classes within correctional facilities (Snyder, Carlo, & Mullins, 2002); however, fewer studies have followed the formerly incarcerated woman's reclamation of her parenting role while focusing on the processes of identity reformation.

C. Significance of the Study

The reconnection of incarcerated women to their parenting role is important because of the strain that prison time places on the family system. The ill effects of family disruption due to incarceration are well-established (Arditti, Lambert-Chute, & Joest, 2003; Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch, & Ungar, 2005; Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Brown & Bloom, 2009; Glaze, & Maruschak, 2008; Hairston, 1991; Johnston, 2001; Miller, 2006; Mumola, 2000; O'Brien, 2001). Families experiencing relationship problems or with histories of domestic violence, substance abuse, and economic fragility are compromised more by the disruption (Hannon, Martin, & Martin, 1984; Snyder, Carlo, & Mullin, 2002). Many women may have burned proverbial bridges due to problems with addictions prior to incarceration. These relationship remnants influence the reclamation of parenting roles and the manner in which the transfer of parenting occurs. Additionally, the transfer of parenting and the interactions the formerly incarcerated mother has with the family caregiver may have a significant impact on her reformation of identity. The parenting role for the formerly incarcerated mother is challenged in ways that are influenced by relational history.

Furthermore, many challenges that incarcerated women face are identified as gender specific. For instance, "when fathers go to prison, their children are more likely to remain in the

care of their mothers; however, when mothers go to prison, not only are the children separated from the mother, but they more often transition to the grandparent or another family member” (Dallaire, 2007, p. 443) for care rather than to the father (Johnston, 2001; Kazura, 2001; Mumola, 2000; Seymour, 1998). Hence, an examination of identity reformation and the reclamation of the parenting role between the formerly incarcerated woman and her children’s family caregiver may add to our understanding about the complexities of this recursive process. It may create a greater understanding about how these processes are negotiated and yield more insight about the programming needs for the family system.

According to Brown and Bloom (2009), maternal concerns are foremost for incarcerated women reentering the community and constitute a critical subjective aspect of their lives in prison. Brown and Bloom further agree that maternal concerns are a long-standing issue that is complicated by the social ills women experience prior to incarceration such as family instability, troubled relationships, the pathway to addiction, and offending that takes place during the woman’s child-rearing years. These issues leave a complex maternal legacy for women to address after release from prison.

Another rationale for this study is that social support is a known buffer and protective factor in human life. According to Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch, and Ungar (2005), social support protects individuals from the potentially harmful effects of stressful life events. Many incarcerated women report having concerns about resuming the parenting role, such as fears and anxieties about their parenting abilities and guilt related to the perception that they abandoned their children. The support women who have been incarcerated receive from their children’s

family caregiver can be viewed as relational support, which may help to build their reconnection to parenting.

O'Brien (2001) acknowledged just how little documentation exists about women offenders' conviction, incarceration, and return to the community. O'Brien conducted a qualitative study that helped fill the gap in understanding women as they transition from prison to the community. There is a continued need to learn more about the reintegration of African American women back into the community. Moreover, as incarceration has an ill effect on the family, it is vital to examine her maternal role in resuming parenting.

Examining the formerly incarcerated mother's reformation of maternal identity and the reclamation of the parenting role as a process between the formerly incarcerated mother and the family caregiver of her children adds to the literature related to women's reentry processes. The increase in the reentry numbers of incarcerated women with children is an important issue to address for social workers with a social justice focus. There must be a concern about the disproportionate effect incarceration has had on African American women who are undereducated, are economically deprived, and have experienced various types of oppression based on their race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status.

The burgeoning growth in the numbers of women affected by the criminal legal system is well documented (Glaze, 2011; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Greenfield & Snell, 1999; Guerino, Harrison, & Sabol, 2011; Kane-Willis, Janichek, & Clark, 2006; Mumola, 2000; Snell, 1994; West & Sabol, 2010). Scholars have aptly noted the glaring gap for research conducted on women's imprisonment as compared to the amount of attention men's

imprisonment consistently receives. Researchers established that women are most often incarcerated for nonviolent drug related offenses; and 4 out of 10 inmates [male or female] in state prisons reported that they never received drug or alcohol treatment for drug or alcohol abuse (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Olson, Escobar, & Stalans, 2011). African American women in particular have been impacted as they are disproportionately represented in the criminal legal system, impoverished, poorly educated, underemployed, victimized by violence, and often drug dependent and in need of treatment. In addition, many incarcerated African American women are mothers who leave children and families behind. In order to promote successful reentry the relational aspects of their experiences postprison need to be understood. This study sought to gain an understanding of formerly incarcerated women's personal experiences of identity reformation as a relational process influenced by the interactions she has with the family caregiver as she reclaims the parenting role.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RELATED LITERATURE

A. Conceptual Framework

I use Black Feminist Epistemology and Identity Theory as the guiding frameworks for this study. Black feminist epistemology attempts to resist oppression, clarify Black women's experiences and ideas, and support broad principles of social justice. The development of Black Feminist Thought is an effort to reclaim Black women's ideas, which have otherwise been silenced. Currently, Black feminist thought has six distinguishing features: (1) it links Black women's oppression with a call to activism; (2) it recognizes diverse responses, which means it cannot be essentialist in its approach; (3) it is concerned with the integration of Black feminist thought and practices; (4) it is concerned with Black intellectual thought and dialogical practices; (5) it views Black feminist thought as dynamic and not stagnant; and (6) it views U. S. Feminism and other social justice projects as interdependent. These features are similar to co-constructionist views as it accounts for the elements of contextual realities. Co-constructionist views its work in subjectivity and intersubjectivity and actively seek to co-create knowledge in collaboration with the actors (Petit & Huault, 2008) or participants of their research study.

1. Black feminist epistemology

Throughout the emergence of feminist theory, researchers and theorists have argued that feminist research is necessary because women were formerly excluded from scholarship. Furthermore, it has been accepted that men became the unspoken representatives for humanity with unassailable discourses of power and domination in the practice of science (Jackson, 2006). Feminism can be viewed as a vehicle by which one seeks to understand and respectfully include

the voices representing women's perspectives. Feminism developed as a response to exclusionary practices; yet, excluded the voice of African American women and their feminist understandings in the Academy.

Hill Collins (2000) conceptualized Black feminist thought in response to Black women's omission in intellectual writings and in new feminist conceptualizations. Collins views the exclusion of Black women's intellectual work as an intentional mechanism of the system that oppressed them. According to Collins, "The shadow obscuring . . . Black women's intellectual tradition is neither accidental nor benign" (2000, p. 3).

Black feminist thought is a theory intended to expand feminist discourse in the Academy and illuminate the problems inherent in exclusionary practices. When Black women's experiences, concepts, theories, and perspectives are excluded from feminist thought, it truncates feminism as a whole. Collins (2000) indicated that the traditional relationship between White feminist scholars in the U.S. and Black women has been tenuous. Collins (2000), states that it has been customary for many White feminist scholars in the U.S. to resist having Black women as full colleagues. It is therefore necessary for Black women to define and articulate their own experiences [and that of other Black women] in the Academy. Collins notes, "Not all White Western feminists participate in these diverse patterns of suppression" (p. 6).

Feminism does not necessarily imply an essentialist positioning but rather one that seeks to enhance understanding based on societal constructions of gender that may yield shared experiences or mutually nuanced meanings. Collins (1989) believes that Black feminist thought focuses on developing a distinctive, self-defined view for and by African American women.

Even so, Black feminist epistemology is neither essentialist nor totally individualized. Collins explains that despite intersecting differences Black women in America have been plagued by obstructive policies. Collins (2000) further asserts that these differences are hidden “behind an array of common beliefs about Black women’s intelligence, work habits, and sexuality and these common beliefs result in recurring experiences for individual group members” (p. 25). Black women from diverse backgrounds report similar experiences of mistreatment based on mainstream society’s beliefs about them.

African American women’s experiences intersect at junctures of multiple types of subordinations. The African American woman may have been racially oppressed, gender oppressed, or oppressed due to her socioeconomic status or class by society, which may influence her identity formation. The intersectionality of multiple devalued identities and experiences may inform the processes of identity reformation and the reclamation of the parenting role, as well as how the mother can negotiate with her child’s caregiver postincarceration.

2. **Identity theory**

Identity theory provides a lens for examining what is involved in identity development for women as they reclaim parenting of their minor-age children. More specifically, I draw on the concept of devalued identity and stigma. Stigma, as characterized by Goffman (1963), represents interactional processes. I believe these processes may be conveyed through interaction between the formerly incarcerated mother and her child’s family caregiver, and

stigma then is based on the meanings the formerly incarcerated mother makes of the interactions. These processes will be described further in Figure 1.

According to Goffman (1963), the ability to individualize a person from another is what gives people identity. Therefore, the context of the formerly incarcerated African American woman may not be taken for granted as if it is one monolithic experience belonging to all African American women who are formerly incarcerated. Rather, one may consider the multiplicity of characteristics embodied in the experiences of African American women once involved in the criminal legal system. African American women have varying degrees of internal strengths and perceptions about their own socioeconomic situation, education, opportunities, support, resources, and exposure to trauma. Nonetheless, there will be identifiable similarities that speak to their contextualized experiences as formerly incarcerated African American women.

Blemished by their imprisonment, formerly incarcerated women experience stigma related to their incarceration and motherhood. Relational support may influence the formerly incarcerated woman's sense of identity and may have an influence on the reclamation of her parenting role. Exploring how identity is re-formed is important because while some studies focus on identity in women's imprisonment, few studies focus on the reformation of identity for women postincarceration and in relation to their reclaiming the parenting role as a process influenced by their relationship with their child's family caregiver. On a micro level, incarceration can potentially change the way women view themselves. For example, some

women lose their parenting identity during incarceration while others do not. Some imprisoned mothers have salient identities and others are at risk of relinquishing their parental identity if they cannot reconcile imprisonment with their maternal role (Stringer & Barnes, 2012).

Imprisoned mothers may experience a disconnection with their maternal identity. Some mothers express regret about the separation from their children while others negatively internalize the association of incarceration that depicts them as depraved mothers which may discourage them from maintaining bonds with their children (Baunach, 1985; Enos, 2001; Ferraro & Moe, 2003; Schram, 1999). Enos (2001) also found that imprisoned mothers holding the perception of being good mothers disassociated themselves from other imprisoned but unfit mothers. Examining how identity is re-formed postincarceration is equally important as the formerly incarcerated mother reclaims her parenting role as a negotiated process with her child's family caregiver.

According to my conceptual framework, incarcerated women's maternal identity and the reclaiming of their parenting role are influenced by micro level interactional processes embedded within the context of relational support from their child's family caregiver. The formerly incarcerated woman and her child's family caregiver may not transfer the parenting role immediately and may, depending upon their circumstance, coparent together for a period before the mother is able to reclaim the parenting role fully and independently. In this regard, coparenting may serve as a precursor to reclaiming the parenting role. Coparenting is defined as a multigenerational extended kinship system where grandmothers or other relatives assume

caregiving responsibilities for children when parents are absent (Strozier, Armstrong, Skuza, Cecil, & McHale. 2011).

In addition to coparenting, the formerly incarcerated mother may be influenced by the family caregiver's appraisals of her parenting or life choices in such a manner that influences her sense of maternal identity as it re-forms. Equally, relational support that is viewed as warm and affirming may influence the maternal identity of the formerly incarcerated woman as well. Additionally, maternal identity and reclaiming the parenting role may be better analyzed through a framework that veers from the mainstream dominant perspective.

In addition, identity theory guides the analysis of the data and provides a conceptual lens for understanding maternal identity in tandem with relational support and more importantly, with relational processes. The way family members' interpret the formerly incarcerated mother's circumstance may influence how they relate to her and express messages about her as a parent. If a mother experiences guilt and shame, her family's appraisal of her as a parent may influence her opinion about herself as a parent. Thus, her child's family caregiver may influence the reformation of her maternal identity through the relational interactions. The level of relational support or perception of relational support received may influence the mother's view of maternal identity. Figure 1 describes the conceptual model for how the formerly incarcerated mother, through interactional processes, re-forms her maternal identity and reclaims parenting. These important entanglements may be influenced by relational support and coparenting with the child's family caregiver after release from prison.

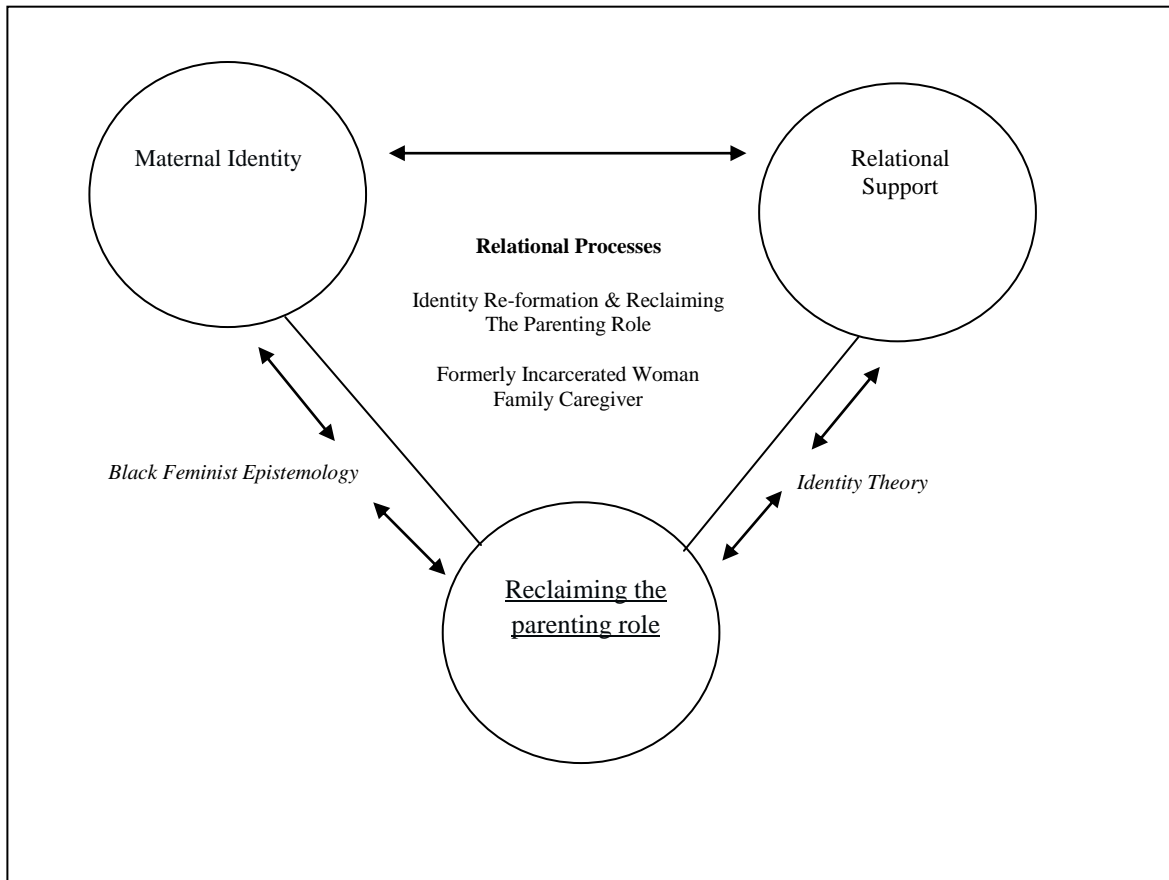


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

B. Review of Related Literature

The review of the literature is related to African American women and incarceration, personal identity and stigma, maternal identity, and coparenting. This section begins with a broader view of what has been established in the literature about African American women and incarceration and identity theory in general; then I look to see what is known about maternal identity and coparenting. The review of the literature provides an examination of how research has studied, defined, and framed the incarceration of African American women in particular, defined identity over time, and reveals disparate definitions of maternal identity.

1. African American women and incarceration

The criminology literature related to African American women and incarceration examines pathways to criminal involvement for African American women and not other aspects of their experiences like reconnecting to parenting. Other studies focus on the effects of parental incarceration on children, caretaking of children of incarcerated parents, stress on incarcerated mothers, and visitation issues of incarcerated women and their children (Hanlon, Carwell, & Rose, 2007; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Tuerk & Loper, 2006; White, Galietta, & Escobar, 2006). Scholars have also examined the effectiveness of parenting classes on incarcerated mothers within correctional facilities (Snyder, Carlo, & Mullins, 2002). Few studies have followed the formerly incarcerated African American woman's reclamation of her parenting role as she reintegrates into the community and family living. To understand the formerly incarcerated African American woman, it is first necessary to examine her life's circumstances leading up to the incarceration.

Many African American women's pathway to prison has been a gendered one. According to Richie (1996), African American women who are a part of the American criminal legal system have been relegated to gendered imprisonment. African American women who live in the margins of society have unresolved trauma and stark opportunities that can contribute to their criminal involvement. Richie also contends that African American women's traumatic histories entrap them and larger societal structures seek to control them through the criminal legal system.

A variety of studies document the array of traumatic events African American women experience before becoming involved in the legal system, such as some types of abuse (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1992; Richie, 1996; Snell, 1994). More specifically, many African American women inmates report having suffered sexual abuse in their intimate relationships.

According to Henriques and Manatu-Rupert (2001), poor African American women's failed attempts at securing their mainstream role in society have led many of them into unhealthy intimate partnerships. The mainstream role refers to the middle class heterosexist dominant view of relationships within American culture. According to Whitlow (2006), the Eurocentric or dominant view places standards, ideals, and values of the White culture at the center of analysis. The dominant view then assumes that its own standards may be the hallmark of optimal behavior—a target for any group of people to achieve regardless of their own cultural values. Women's desire to comply with the ideological norm of creating successful family structure is often not congruent with their life experiences and in fact, can have devastating personal and social results (Henriques & Manatu-Rupert, 2001).

African American women experience additional barriers to healthy relational lives. The intersection of gender, race/ethnicity, and violence creates an “effective system of organizing African American battered women’s behavior into patterns that leave them vulnerable to private and public subordination, to violence in their intimate relationships and, in turn, to participation in illegal activities” (Richie, 1996, p. 4). Richie describes this vulnerability as a gender entrapment. Because African American women in particular experience gender entrapment, they have assumed more subordinate roles in their relationships. Richie (1996) found that many African American women participated in their partner’s “illegal activities” (p. 4) to be close to them and out of fear of retaliation if they refused (Henriques & Manatu-Rupert, 2001).

To illustrate this point further, Henriques and Manatu-Rupert (2001) assert that women enter into the criminal legal system via the mechanism of gender entrapment only to find that their “desire to act in concert with expected gender roles within a stable, traditional relationship” is unrealized (p. 8). Unstable relationships and other social factors add to the complex intersectionality of race, class, and gender. African American women living in poverty without access to mainstream resources adapt to alternate roles within society.

In addition to societal strains, African American women may have strained family relations—especially if they have a history of substance abuse problems. Henriques and Manatu-Rupert (2001) assumed that for poor incarcerated African American women, “the confluence of poverty, violence, race, gender, class, drug use and abuse, failed intimate relationships, and fractured familial ties combined to undermine their individual efforts as they attempt to live successfully on the outside” (p. 15). Further research that examines the relational processes

between the formerly incarcerated African American woman and her child's family caregiver as they reclaim the parenting role may further highlight the confluence of factors influencing the formerly incarcerated woman as well as help to shed some light on the relational impact on identity reformation for the formerly incarcerated mother.

2. Personal and social identity and stigma

Several researchers posit theoretical perspectives related to identity. The early literature on identity is conceptually based and provides a framework for thinking about identity, stigma, devalued identity, and multiple identities (Erikson, 1968; Goffman, 1963; Golden, 2005). Goffman's (1963) work provides a framework for examining women's stigma related to their former status as prisoner and maternal status.

Erikson (1968) provided a psychosocial perspective of identity development sparking interest in further research. Erikson's eight stage model of (identity) development proposed that an individual's experience of the *self* coheres with past, current, and future self-perceptions as well as what the self believes others expect (Laney, Carruthers, Hall, & Anderson, 2013). According to Erikson, identity development begins in adolescence as a component of the lifecycle—a monolithic experience in human development. The expansion of how identity develops now includes feminist theories, which highlight the gender differential whereby feminists view women's development as primarily relational (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991). Erikson believes that each stage creates a tension between two opposing extremes and the successful negotiation of these extremes means the

person advances to the next stage of identity development. Conversely, problematic interactions, like incarceration, can stigmatize one's identity.

Golden (2005) writes about the negative stigma that formerly incarcerated African American mothers' experience. According to Golden, poor families are often burdened with the stigma of incarceration as poor families reside in deindustrialized urban spaces that are void of opportunities for economic security. Poor African American women face violent stigmas that "predestine their incarceration" (Golden, 2005, p. 3). Mothers with low income who comply with the dominant system are viewed as the worthy poor and Golden asserts, those who are too sassy, hostile, or perceived as ungrateful are the unworthy poor whose plight is largely ignored by society. Furthermore, Golden stresses that a gendered racial oppression exists that African American women face, which further complicates their renegotiation of multiple identities.

Goffman (1963) theorized personal identity in relation to stigmatization and the management of stigma. According to Goffman (1963), stigma refers to the less desirable characteristics an individual possesses. The less abiding or less desirable characteristics create a stigmatization influenced by relational processes. Stigmatization is processed in the social sphere through the interactional processes and conveyed through reflexive action through oneself in relation to others. As a result, one's stigma is processed by the meaning the individual holds about the stigma and by the shared social spaces that reflexively influence meaning making. Social spaces become important because social information is conveyed by symbols denoting prestige, honor, or desirable class position.

Goffman (1963) theorized what he believed stigma meant in the original Greek. Conceptually, Goffman described stigma as having double meaning. The first meaning deals with the ‘discredited’ individual; the second meaning deals with the individual being discreditable. The discredited individual may assume that his differences are apparent or evident to others. People may become discreditable when they assume that others do not know their differences. Ideas about the discredited and the discreditable have been linked with perceptions of self-identity. Moreover, this suggests that one’s identity may play a role in the way the individual negotiates or manages stigma.

Stigma produces meanings about devalued identities. People who experience stigma have a social identity that questions their humanity and devalues them in relation to others (Crocker and Quinn, 2008; Goffman, 1963; Jones, Farina, Hastorf, Markus, Miller, & Scott, 1984). Conversely, individualism is highly valued in Western culture; core ideologies such as self-reliance and personal responsibility vilify and devalue that not considered normal. Personal responsibility suggests that the negative outcomes of people with devalued identities are under their control. Therefore, people view stigma as their fault, which in turn means they deserve the negative consequences of a devalued identity (Crocker & Quinn, 2008). The concept of personal responsibility assumes that the individual has control over what happens in his or her life. Personal responsibility does not take into account the structural or societal factors that contribute to poor outcomes for people. Taking the perspective of personal responsibility seeks to neutralize the effect of stigma by placing blame on the individual regardless of life’s circumstances.

Goffman (1963) explained the stigma of imprisonment as a blemish of individual character from having a weak will. Stigmatized individuals are viewed as less than human. Based on this assumption, Goffman asserts that individuals exercise varieties of discrimination, which reduce the individual's life chances. Golden (2005) suggests that stigma has a threefold purpose, especially as it pertains to Black mothers. First, Golden suggests that the stigmatization of Black incarcerated women redirects society's attention to issues of racial oppression. Second, Golden argues that those who transgress the law must be punished in order to justify regulatory policies and laws. Third, Golden believes stigma is used to maintain hierarchies of power and privilege. Golden takes into consideration the underlying impetus for stigma and extends Goffman's view of it as both an individualized character flaw and the invidious effect it has on narrowing the individual's opportunities in life.

In addition, the formerly incarcerated mother must contend with self-views and social views that influence her overall sense of identity reformation in the context of stigmatized perceptions of her experiences. The formerly incarcerated mother and her family caregiver are faced with devalued identities that hold judgments about incarceration. Some family members experience feelings of stigma and embarrassment and the formerly incarcerated mother herself may experience a great deal of societal disdain for violating societal expectations. Incarceration for women produces a moral stigma. Golden states that Black women are held as producers for America's most persistent moral problems (drugs, poverty, and crime) rather than seen as victims of racial and gendered oppression.

Society focuses on blame rather than the amelioration of structural factors that contribute to African American women's poverty, participation in drugs, crime, and the abandonment of mothering responsibilities. Blaming the women for their own response to oppression provides little relief from this cycle of crime, broken families, and weakened communities. African American women may find it necessary to renegotiate multiple identities—especially those that have been devalued.

The formerly incarcerated mother may contend with multiple identities. Swann and Bosson (2010) propose that people can take on numerous identities in the context of give-and-take interactions with one another. The devalued aspects of one or more of these identities may stigmatize the formerly incarcerated mother and the family caregiver. The Stone Center Writings make clear the distinction and importance of relationship in women's lives. "By relationship I [Surrey] mean an experience of emotional and cognitive intersubjectivity: the ongoing, intrinsic inner awareness and responsiveness to the continuous existence of the other or others and the expectation of mutuality in this regard" (Jordan, et al, 1991, p. 61). A woman's identity is intertwined with the experiences she has with others around her—shaped by the relational entanglements of her environment. A woman's identity has been conceptualized in a gender specific manner through the Stone Center Writings from their Women's Project.

Symbolic interaction may be viewed as a subcomponent of identity theory in the examination of women's maternal identity reformation. It is something that is constructed, relational, and interactional. Nonetheless, a feminist framework facilitates a view of meaning—

making that may be better understood as distinctive and essentially different for women because it emanates from relational spaces.

Shared meaning is important to researchers for different reasons. As formerly incarcerated mothers reconnect to their families and attempt to re-form their identity, it happens in the space of shared meaning with the family caregiver of her children. Both parties may re-form their identities in relation to the role of primary caretaker of the children. The reformation of identity is contextualized by relational processes and by the co-construction of shared meanings.

3. Maternal identity

The literature related to maternal identity and how it forms is critical to this study as it may provide a lens for examining how formerly incarcerated mothers re-form their own maternal identities post release. Having a point of reference in the literature and an idea of how it has been viewed provided a reference base for data analysis.

According to Mercer (2004), Rubin's seminal work in 1967 introduced maternal role attainment "as a process leading to the woman's achievement of maternal role identity. An ideal image of self as mother is constructed from extensive psychosocial work in pregnancy and postpartum and through this image the maternal identity is incorporated into her self-system" (p.1) [self-image]. Therefore, maternal identity may be viewed as an additional layer to self-identity.

Rubin's (1967) work capturing the maternal experience of women was examined from a traditional viewpoint. Maternal identity is influenced by the supportive inputs from family and

other significant persons in the mother's life and "is actually woven in the themes of maternal tasks" (Rubin, 1967, p. 54). Rubin's research describes family as having the structure of the traditional nuclear family.

The maternal tasks are addressed by three interrelated systems: the self-system, the maternal-child subsystems, and the larger family system. In addition, Rubin's (1984) work focused largely on pregnancy and early infancy. Maternal tasks and behaviors include nurturing, caring, teaching, guiding, protecting, and loving in a way that enhances the child's overall development. The mother's ability to carry out maternal tasks may be affected by factors such as maternal age, mental health/well being, socioeconomic status, education, mother-child separations, culture, and support systems (Flagler, 1990; Mercer, 1981; Rubin, 1984). Maternal tasks are a part of the mothering experience and motherhood refers to the way in which mothering is carried out.

In a review and synthesis of previous and current research, Mercer (2004), a former student of Rubin, sought to redefine maternal identity as a transition to motherhood versus mere role attainment. According to Mercer, the expansion of the woman's maternal identity is enhanced when she is able to take on new challenges by making new connections to regain confidence in the self. Mercer continues where Rubin left off by adding to the understanding of the dynamic nature of maternal identity throughout the lifespan. Mercer's findings arise from her review of the qualitative literature on transitions to motherhood.

Mercer (2004) asserts that becoming a mother is a process best studied in transitions from a lifespan approach. These transitions are bound in time and influenced by stressors and

supports. This body of literature is relevant to my proposed study as it provides a definition of maternal identity embedded within a dynamic context. Formerly incarcerated mothers re-form their identity as they transition from prison to the community. In addition, formerly incarcerated women experience many life stressors as they seek to reclaim their parenting role and garner relational support.

Miller (2005) draws a careful distinction between mothering and motherhood. “Mothering refers to the personal, individual experiences that women have in meeting the needs of and being responsible for their dependent children” (p. 3); “motherhood, on the other hand, refers to the context in which mothering takes place and is experienced” (p. 3). Motherhood in the Western world is an institution that is shaped by historical, social, cultural, political, and moral influences.

Mothering ideologies change and shift over time and according to context, social, cultural, political, and moral influences. According to Miller, good mothering is based on the idea that mothers spend time with their children to fulfill intensive nurturing while working to provide for the child financially. “The notion of the ‘good’ mother, who stays at home or experiences guilt or ambivalence as a result of combining mothering with paid work outside the home, has been premised on particular groups of White, privileged women” (Miller, 2005, p. 55). Mothering ideologies are pervasive, dynamic, and linked to power. As such, powerful ideologies tend to override individual experiences and strengthen idealized notions of motherhood that in turn do not accommodate the diversity of motherhood experiences. It is

important to recognize the difference and avoid essentializing women's mothering experiences to the dominant referent group of White, middle class, married women (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991).

Mothering ideologies also include views of worthy versus unworthy mothers. Consider how society places value on compliant poor mothers as worthy and as a result, are inscribed less devalued identities (Golden, 2005). Golden further explains that nonconformist mothers may be punished by labels of neglect—especially if they are too sassy, hostile, ungrateful, disassembling, or despairing. Moreover, the intersectionality of classism, racism, and sexism forges a wider chasm between the poor mother and mainstream culture. According to Golden, despite experiencing social exclusion, poor Black mothers, especially those who have experienced abuse, seek an elusive status of middle-class respectability for their families.

In a mixed-method study examining the experiences of women's reconnection to motherhood, Brown and Bloom (2009) conducted 25 in-depth interviews and examined 203 parole case files of mostly impoverished indigenous formerly incarcerated Hawaiian women. Longstanding issues like "poverty, lack of education, unstable housing, lack of access to social services, and underemployment" (p. 313) are issues that "move women along a pathway to addiction and offending" and usually "occur during women's childbearing years, leaving them with a very complex maternal legacy to address after prison" (Brown & Bloom, 2009, pp. 314–315). After examining the women's narratives, Brown and Bloom provided descriptive details about the interplay between the subjective aspects of women's reentry related to their maternal experience.

Other problems illuminated in Brown and Bloom's (2009) research points to change in maternal identity and caregiver relationships. Brown and Bloom further report that their "interviews revealed that even when ties of affection remain strong, problems with children and caregivers pose a series of challenges" [that may influence the mother's experience] (p. 324).

Brown and Bloom (2009) described what the women experienced prior to incarceration as a troubled motherhood, prior to the mother's incarceration. Women's troubled motherhood consists of contact with both the criminal legal system and the child welfare system. Additionally, other troubling issues may include the formerly incarcerated women's marginalization, strained relationships, addiction, and violence.

Richie (1996) conducted research using grounded theory to explain African American women's illegal activities. In her study related to identity development, Richie examined battered and nonbattered African American women's experiences and conceptualized three basic groupings of African American women. The first grouping described their experiences as privileged—reporting that they received attention, resources, and emotional support from their families. The second grouping described having an average existence—feeling that they had equal importance in comparison to other family members but not much support. The third grouping reported having more household responsibilities, families who showed less interest in them, lower socioeconomic statuses, and fewer resources than the other women in this study. According to Richie, the battered women in her study expressed that their identities were tied to pleasing others, which left them more vulnerable than nonbattered African American women. Richie concluded that African American battered women had a sense of ethnic identity and

family loyalty that had an adverse effect on their identities. Further, Richie concluded that this sense of solidarity hindered the women's self-determination and independence, thereby making them susceptible to gender entrapment that resulted in victimization by intimate partner violence or illegal activities.

Women have specific needs based on distinct gendered experiences. Many have experienced violent victimization, drug addiction, and involvement in prostitution. Moe and Ferraro (2006) conducted a qualitative study of women's life histories and found that motherhood and criminality were explicitly linked. According to Moe and Ferraro, women view motherhood from two primary vantage points. The first vantage point is motherhood as a valuable social status reflective of mainstream expectations. The second vantage point is of motherhood as a pragmatic obligation to provide for their children despite struggles of impoverishment, abuse, and drug use. These two vantage points provide insight into the ways some women explain and contextualize their motherhood identity in prosocial and pragmatic ways.

a. Motherhood as prosocial identity

An awareness of the hegemonic stance on motherhood made it necessary for women to perceive themselves as good mothers, thus creating a more prosocial identity. "In so doing, they were able to think of themselves as something other than criminal—an asset and a valuable member of society" (Moe & Ferraro, 2006, p. 143). Moe and Ferraro found that in their sample, despite incarcerated mothers' criminal status, they undeniably viewed themselves in a positive light. The researchers concluded, "More than providing a buttress against negative

connotations of their criminalized state, seeing themselves as good and worthy mothers provided the women with a kind of strength and resilience they may not have derived from anywhere else” (Moe & Ferraro, 2006, p. 143). The perception of being a good mother served as a buffer for a more prosocial identity. Yet, many participants were not able to identify positively with their motherhood image and struggled to reconcile their past. Several participants had remorse for their criminal past and internalized social stigma due to their criminalization.

More specific to African American women, albeit not exclusively, is the resilience and support they derive from their religious convictions. Earlier conceptualizations found religious convictions to be counterproductive (Ross, 1998) to them realizing their own oppression. Ross described the use of religion as a way to provide comfort while reinforcing social control because women look inward or toward God to explain their circumstances. This inward reflection, or God-directed focus, prevents women from recognizing and/or examining structural conditions that reinforce violent histories, racial oppression, and poverty that criminalized women face because it deflects the focus away from their oppression. Ferraro and Moe (2003) later concluded that a popular coping strategy for incarcerated African American women who were able to attend church was their Christian beliefs. Ferraro and Moe further explained, “due to their religious beliefs prior to incarceration and/or the religiously guided social support inside the facility, women turned to their faith for comfort, empowerment, and cultural pride” (Ferraro & Moe, 2003, p. 145). The religious orientation may also help to preserve African American women’s perceptions of their parenting identity post-incarceration.

b. Motherhood as a pragmatic obligation

According to Moe and Ferraro (2006), women also view motherhood as a pragmatic obligation to provide for their children. Women's ability to provide for their children was complicated by obstacles like poverty, abuse, and drug use. As stated by Moe and Ferraro (2006), "... women's obligations to provide for their children were often connected to their motivations for committing crimes" (p. 146). Many women expressed a sense of guilt for being absent from their children's life. Motherhood is viewed as an obligation to provide for their children and when they are not present to provide for their children, they experience disappointment with their maternal identity.

One way that incarcerated women attempt to cope with the guilt of separation from their children is to maintain some form of contact with them. Despite the burden of incarceration, women have tried many avenues to remain connected to their motherhood status. Moe and Ferraro (2006) found that "doing so allowed them to think about the future ... and provided them comfort, motivation for change and resistance to the social stigma placed upon them" (p. 147). Additionally, Moe and Ferraro (2006) indicate that within detention centers, little recognition exists about the powerful role motherhood plays for incarcerated women. For many incarcerated women, post release survival may be bolstered through their parenting identity and parenting role.

c. Historical context of African American motherhood

The institution of slavery depicted Black motherhood in a derogatory

manner. As noted by Roberts (1995), “The stereotype of Black women as sexually promiscuous helped to perpetuate their devaluation as mothers” (p. 950). According to Collins (1994), Black women were characterized as a Jezebel in order to justify the slave owner’s sexual exploitation of the Black woman. Roberts (1995) stated that “For centuries, a popular mythology has degraded Black women and portrayed them as less deserving of motherhood” (p. 950), and further argued that more contemporary images and devaluation of Black mothers includes portraying them as lazy welfare mothers who breed children at the expense of taxpayers. Collins (1994) stated “Motherhood occurs in specific historical contexts framed by interlocking structures of race, class, and gender”... (p. 56). Additionally, the way mothering is conceived, organized, and carried out is not predicated on materials and culture alone but rather within specific historical circumstances.

Some scholars have debated the influence of slavery on contemporary Black family formation (Cross, 2003; Wilson, 1987) while others argue that the legacy of slavery is related to distinct social structures that may impact the family and its utilities (Levernier & White, 1998; Vandiver, Giacomassi & Lofquist, 2006). It is important to avoid narrowing the African American family experience to the point of essentialist prescriptions. Yet, it is equally necessary to entertain the influence slavery has had on the African American family. One vestige of slavery is the influence family disruption has on family caregiving practices.

Shared mothering is characteristic of African American communities since slavery and continues in many contemporary communities (Glenn, 1994). Cultural contexts and variations in material conditions have resulted in a divergence in the ways African American women

construct mothering. It veers from the dominant cultural model. African values of the family, the concept of the collective versus the individual, and historical social conditions hasten adaptive and flexible mothering roles—which can be linked to the extended family and community (Billingsley, 1992; Collins, 1994; Glenn, 1994). According to Glenn (1994), the existence of historical and cultural variation confirms that mothering is socially constructed, not biological. Glenn further points out that mothering occurs within specific social contexts that vary according to one's material and cultural resources and constraints.

African American shared mothering and caregiving practices have been influenced by African traditions. According to Prater (2011), cultural relativity and structural/organizational theories have examined the historical influences of slavery on the African American family. Researchers who employ cultural relativity emphasize the unique influence of culture and see the “African American family as embodying its own cultural integrity traceable to its African ancestry” (p. 205). Prater draws attention to the role of the extended family network as a characteristic of African families and further asserts that “the African American family, especially during slavery and later, survived because it maintained the residuals of the African family support system” (Prater, 2011, p. 209). Structural or organizational theorists believe that the family organization is determined by environment. Families are influenced by their adaptation to their physical milieu, which may change according to their station in life. Family organization adapts to the ecology in order to survive (Azevedo, 2011). The ecology of splintered families during slavery made it necessary for African Americans to use extended family networks for survival. In this light, African family organization has “had a relative

permanence or persistence over time, so that they represent aspects of kinship that are legitimately termed a part of the African heritage” (Sudarkasa, 1996, p. 90).

The need of extended family continues years after slavery’s legacy. African American mothers continue to depend on kinship networks for survival. According to Collins (1997), African American women have the burden of supporting all aspects of family life. Unique to African American mothers is an explanation of Black motherhood offered by Collins who asserts that the Black motherhood experience is constantly renegotiated among other Black women, with Black children, and with self. These constant renegotiations suggest a group focus rather than an individualistic view of motherhood. According to Collins, the African American woman is often the dominant figure in the family who has inadequate resources to provide for her family: “The ideal nuclear family, where the mother has total child-rearing responsibilities, does not lend itself to the African American mother whose racial oppression has denied her family sufficient resources to support their needs” (p. 73). Many African American mothers rely on their own kin networks to provide for their children while they are incarcerated. It is important then to examine the relational aspects between caregivers and formerly incarcerated mothers as mothers reclaim their parenting role.

Collins (2000) writes about one enduring theme: the empowering nature of African American *other mothering*. Other mothering is viewed as a creative response to parenting demands on women who experience racial and gender oppression. “The relationship between bloodmothers and othermothers ... survived the transition...” (p. 181) of slavery to modern times.

The negotiation of maternal identity postincarceration for the African American woman may be understood as a multidimensional activity that is influenced by other relational processes such as the enduring concept of other mothering in the African American community. Additionally, the negotiation of a re-formed identity is best examined within the context of the formerly incarcerated woman's stigmatized identity, as an African American mother, and through external processes in which she finds herself challenged by socioeconomic status, legal processes, an assortment of relational issues, and stigma. The formerly incarcerated mother's ability to negotiate competing tensions may be influenced by her social support system as she attempts to reclaim the parenting role after release.

4. Relational support and its influence on maternal identity

The Stone Center writings focus on the centrality of connections in women's lives and their identities in relation to others. It is a feminist perspective that takes into account the need to understand women in their "gendered" context. The gendered context can be understood as a relational process that is both positive and negative. The positive relations may provide one with feelings of connection and the negative experiences may leave one with feelings of disconnection. Where disconnections occur, it leaves women in pain and suffering (Jordan, 1997). African American women with histories of abuse and marginalization may be further disconnected from the isolation of incarceration unless relational support is maintained.

The maternal support role for the incarcerated woman has long been recognized as important. Hairston (2003) argued that mothers are male and female prisoners' most important sources of support, their most frequent visitors, and in the case of incarcerated mothers, the

caregivers for their children. Mothers of incarcerated women have provided support by continuing their relationship with their incarcerated daughters.

Relational support has been found to be important in the lives of incarcerated women. For example, Enos (2001) examined the preferences of incarcerated mothers regarding the caregiving arrangements for their children and found that mothers in her study considered relational factors like the history of the prior relationship and quality of the relationship between the incarcerated mother and the potential kin caregiver along with practical considerations like available family resources. Possibly, some of these same relational dimensions are present postincarceration, when the family caregiver and formerly incarcerated mother begin negotiating the parenting role.

Relational support, as defined by Proulx, Helms, Milardo and Payne (2009), is the receipt of affirmation, opportunity for discussion, and material assistance in parenting or personal relationships. According to Cobbina (2010), evidence shows that familial bonds support women after release from prison. Families provide informal support to formerly incarcerated women who rely on them for financial and housing support (Arditti & Few, 2008; Cobbina, 2010; Mallik-Kane & Visser, 2008), as well as childcare arrangements. The development of support can have a positive influence on the process of reconnecting to family and the community. Successful reintegration has been linked to developing positive social networks [or relational support] (O'Brien, 2001). Conversely, women who have poor relationships with their mothers are also likely to have limited social or relational support and experience episodic interruptions in family contact (Richie, 1996).

5. Caregiving and coparenting

Stress experienced by caregivers has been documented throughout the literature (Dowdell, 1995; Gleeson & Seryak, 2010; Hanlon, Carswell, & Rose, 2007; Jendrek, 1994). Grandparent caregivers experience a myriad of problems when they assume the parenting role for grandchildren, such as (1) greater social isolation; (2) limitations of daily activities; (3) more depression than grandparents not caring for grandchildren; (4) poor health; (5) financial struggles; and (6) lower levels of marital satisfaction. Some grandparents are forced to stretch their already fragile budgets, quit their jobs, reduce their work hours, and /or exhaust their savings to take on the caregiving role for their grandchildren when the mother has been incarcerated (Hanlon, Carswell, & Rose, 2007). Researchers have identified additional stressors that affect the grandmother socially. For instance, Jendrek (1994) found the stress of raising children after already raising their own increased grandparents' social isolation, alienation, and contributed to them experiencing low social support, coupled with their own reluctance to seek help.

Several studies point to protective factors at the familial-level, which may promote coparenting relationships (Gleeson et al., 2009; Jendrek, 1994). Gleeson et al. (2009) examined the protective factors that are reflective of the caregivers' motivations to care for the children. They found that the protective factors include caregivers' love for the children and their commitment to keeping their families together; desire to keep the children safe and ensure their children's well-being and sense of belonging; and desire to maintain a legacy of shared family caregiving, coupled with a strong sense of family obligation due to spiritual influences of the

caregiver. The motivations for familial caregiving are relevant to this population as a whole regardless of the precipitating events. Moreover, the motivations for familial caregiving may impact relational processes after release, such as the transferring of the parenting role from family caregiver to the formerly incarcerated mother.

A number of studies and a review of the literature by Gleeson and colleagues (2009, 2011), point to incarceration as a growing reason for family caregiving (Gleeson & Seryak, 2010; Gleeson, Strozier, & Littlewood, 2011; O'Brien, 2001; Smith, Krisman, Strozier, & Marley, 2004). More specifically, in a review of the literature, familial motivations for caregiving often arise from the child's biological parent making the request to relatives to care for their child (Gleeson, Strozier, & Littlewood, 2011). Further, family caregiving has implications before and after incarceration. As Gleeson and colleagues state, family caregiving is relevant to pre- and postincarceration living arrangements. Often, the incarcerated mother expresses a desire to have a family caregiver care for her child to prevent the child from entering into the child welfare system. Likewise, the desire for the family arrangement may extend postrelease as the formerly incarcerated mother expects to join the household.

Gleeson and colleagues (2011) review of the literature found that even when biological parents and caregivers were not coresidents, they still shared in some caregiving responsibilities. They further noted that shared responsibilities for coparenting are not inherently characteristic in multigenerational family systems. Numerous issues may enhance or impede relational processes like parenting, transferring the parenting role, and the relational minutia that influences one's identity reformation.

Many factors are evident that affect the processes between the relative caregiver and formerly incarcerated woman. From the literature, Gleeson and colleagues (2011) described that complex mixtures of clinical issues affect coparenting in multigenerational and custodial kinship families. They indicate these are: (a) kinship caregivers' and parents' histories of caring for the child; (b) quality of relationships among parents, kin caregivers, and children; (c) caregiver stress, burden, and depression; (d) needs of children; (e) needs of parents; and the (f) complexity of caregiving arrangements.

One study on the coparenting relationship focused on multigenerational aspects of teen parents within coparenting families, coparenting across cultural groups, and the power dynamics within coparenting relationships (Strozier, Armstrong, Skuza, Cecil, & McHale, 2011). Strozier and colleagues (2011) found several types of coparenting arrangements: (a) the grandmother had primary control and power within the relationship; (b) the mother had primary power; and (c) the parenting was shared fairly equally between grandmother and mother. Further, they found that mothers viewed grandmothers as parenting experts when the grandmother was in control and both agreed with the arrangement. Less frequently, the dyads shared power and control effectively, and least often the mother was in control and the two generations were in mutual agreement.

Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004) developed a framework to define the construct of coparenting. The coparenting framework has four dimensions, which explain the interactional nature of the coparenting relationship. According to Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004), the four

coparenting dimensions are (1) coparenting solidarity; (2) coparenting support; (3) undermining coparenting; and (4) shared parenting.

Coparenting solidarity is defined as a unified executive subsystem. It is demonstrated in the affective realm through expressions of warmth and positive emotions between partners, a manifestation of shared values, and evidence of parental efforts to promote the sense of a strong coparenting dyad, in the absence of the parenting partner by talking about the partner to the child in a positive way.

Coparenting support is defined as “strategies and actions that support and extend the partner’s goals, or the parent’s perceptions of support in his/her efforts to accomplish parenting goals” (Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004, p. 169). Coparenting support utilizes specific strategies such as extending support and providing positive reinforcement. In the coparenting support dimension, Van Egeren and Hawkins focus on the parent’s position as the recipient rather than provider of support.

Undermining coparenting is defined as those actions and strategies used to thwart the partner’s attempts to accomplish parenting goals. Further, undermining consists of criticism and lack of respect for parenting decisions. Undermining is evidenced by overt and hostile actions like name-calling or making disparaging remarks about the partner in their absence. At times, more subtle or covert actions occur like briefly interrupting their coparenting partner to say something to the child or ignoring the other parenting partner’s judgment. Van Egeren and Hawkins focus on the parent’s experiences of undermining from the partner’s perspective rather than his or her contributions to undermining actions or feelings.

Finally, shared parenting in the broadest dimension is defined as the division of caregiving labor. Caregiving labor is ascertained by asking coparents to determine the percentage of time they and/or their coparent spend on caregiving tasks, shared parenting, and limit setting. Shared parenting is assessed in two ways: by the balance of involvement with the child relative to the degree to which the other partner is involved, or by mutual involvement, which denotes the extent that both parents are simultaneously engaged with the child.

In a review of the literature Gleeson et al. (2011) stated that successful coparenting was more often achieved when mother-grandmother dyads shared similar philosophies of child rearing, communicated well with one another, compromised, viewed themselves as a team, and had empathy for one another. “The women who had less solidarity in their coparenting relationship struggled over power, discipline, and the mother’s substance use and subsequent disconnection from the family. These coparents often expressed feelings of despondency, guilt, and fear” (Gleeson et al., 2011, p. 273). The reclamation of the parenting role may be incremental and inclusive of coparenting strategies and, because of its relational nature, may influence the reformation of identity for the formerly incarcerated woman. The reclamation of the parenting role and identity reformation may also be affected by the general relationship over time.

Gleeson and colleagues (2011) asserted that there was reason to believe that the type and quality of the birth parent-caregiver relationship influenced subsequent relations. More specifically, they believed it influenced the entry into coparenting and the form it takes. Relationship quality, power dynamics, parenting style disagreements, and undermining behaviors

may also influence the quality of relationship postincarceration, which in turn may shape the reclamation of the parenting role and maternal identity of the formerly incarcerated woman. The interactional processes of coparenting may influence the formerly incarcerated woman's sense of maternal identity. As the formerly incarcerated mother reclaims her parenting role, there may be some overlap with coparenting with her child's family caregiver; these experiences may influence the formerly incarcerated mother's view of her own maternal identity. In this way, the process is recursive and reflexive. Recursion can take its own output as the next input and may be infinitely extended and useful in considering processes of human interaction. Consider Pinker and Jackendoff's explanation: "recursion refers to a procedure that calls itself, or to a constituent that contains a constituent of the same kind" (2005, p. 203). Coparenting and reforming maternal identity may be recursive as each type of interaction may influence the next. The concept of "reflexivity betweenness" (Cunliffe, 2003, p. 988) may be used to support what occurs between the formerly incarcerated mother and her child's family caregiver in the process of reclaiming the parenting role and reforming her own maternal identity. This concept is rooted in the disciplines of cultural anthropology, sociology, and social constructionism; and draws attention to the constitutive nature of language (Cunliffe, 2003). Research may focus on how new meanings are created in the interactional space between participants—which Cunliffe asserts is a first-order approach to applying reflexivity: considering how others socially construct their realities.

C. Summaries of Related Literature

The literature review highlighted the rationale for using a Black feminist epistemology and identity theory as guiding frameworks for this study. Black feminist thought is inclusive and respectful of the Black woman's experiences. Black feminist epistemology seeks to elucidate the knowledge and experiences of Black women by considering the context of gender oppression, racism, and classism; and it eschews exclusionary dominant practices. This study uses a Black feminist epistemology to understand the experiences of the formerly incarcerated African American women in relation to their gender, class, and cultural identity from a nondominant hegemonic stance.

In addition, I use identity theory to examine the ways in which formerly incarcerated African American women re-form their identities. The literature review on identity theory supports the need for further exploration of African American women's experiences postincarceration as they re-form their maternal identity. Moreover, it is important to explore the relational aspects of reclaiming the parenting role while considering the influence of relational support, aspects of coparenting, and influences of the family caregiver. The literature on identity theory has examined the identity of mothers while incarcerated and few studies have focused on maternal identity postincarceration (Arditti & Few, 2003; Brown & Bloom, 2009; Clark, 1995; Stringer & Barnes, 2012)—especially as a relational process effected by the relationship between the formerly incarcerated mother and her child's family caregiver.

1. Summary-African American women and incarceration

A review of the literature on African American women and incarceration examines a myriad of issues from pathways to incarceration, over representation of African American women in the criminal legal system, characteristics of the incarcerated woman, and trauma and broken relationships. Richie (1996) conducted research on African American women involved in America's prison system and found a link between marginalized and battered African American women with histories of unresolved trauma and their involvement in the criminal legal system. Other research identified mitigating issues like substance abuse, trauma, strained family relationships and abusive intimate relationships (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1992; Henriques & Manatu-Rupert, 2001; O'Brien, 2001; Snell, 1994).

Poor relationships add to the contextual portrait of the formerly incarcerated woman's life (Henriques & Manatu-Rupert & Richie, 1996). The relational strains the formerly incarcerated woman experienced prior to incarceration may resurface to influence her experiences postincarceration (Enos, 2001). Richie (1996) further documents the impact of poor relationships for the battered African American woman as it makes her vulnerable to gender entrapment. Richie also notes that many battered African American women are more vulnerable to accept subordinated positions within their romantic relationships.

A history of strained family relations and issues of unresolved trauma from physical and sexual abuse add to the multicontextual and intersecting realities of formerly incarcerated African American women. African American women in particular have been impacted as they are disproportionately represented in the criminal legal system, are impoverished, poorly

educated, underemployed, victimized by violence, and often drug dependent and in need of treatment. In addition, many incarcerated African American women are mothers who leave children and families behind. To promote successful reintegration and reentry, the relational aspects of their experiences postprison need to be understood in order to improve on the provision of direct services and program planning.

2. Summary—Personal identity and stigma

Goffman's (1963) seminal work on identity included the concept of stigma and a conceptualization about the way it is managed by people. Stigma, as originally proposed, was relationally influenced. Stigma produced devalued identities by the stigmatized person and in society. According to Goffman (1963), imprisonment places a blemish on the individual's character. Golden (2005) extends the concept of stigmatization further to relate it to the role it plays for African American mothers. According to Golden, moral stigmatization is not a matter of conceptualization only but rather suggests that it has a threefold purpose for Black mothers, (1) to detract from racial oppression, (2) to justify regulatory policies/laws that punish transgressors and (3) to maintain hierarchies of power and privilege.

Swann and Bosson (2010) propose that people acquire multiple identities. One or more of the formerly incarcerated mother's identities may bring stigma shared by the family caregiver. Personal identity and social stigma influence both the formerly incarcerated mother and her child's family caregiver. Both women who are caring for the child may experience the guilt and shame related to deviating from society's expected role of good mothering. For instance, the maternal caregiver may experience stigma for having an adult daughter with a devalued

criminalized identity; and the formerly incarcerated mother may experience stigma for having a negative identity for not being a good enough mother. Society expects mothers to nurture, protect, and prepare children to become productive members of society. More widely accepted dominant views define motherhood as an individualized and private role restricted to one's own children (Aborampah & Sudarkasa, 2011; Glenn, 1994). When mothers do not adhere to dominant expectations for motherhood, stigma may follow—especially as it pertains to devalued identities and labels such as ex-convict, formerly incarcerated, felon, and mother. The complex mix of contextual realities like classism, racism, and sexism serve as barriers for poor African American women and deepen their sense of stigma and disconnection to mainstream society. It is important to uphold social justice by recognizing the effect of oppression on vulnerable populations.

3. Summary—Maternal identity

Motherhood has traditionally been defined as a role that adds to maternal identity. Early in the literature, motherhood is influenced by family interactions and its primary functions are nurturing and producing a well-balanced child (Rubin, 1984). Later theories of motherhood focused on a privileged view of mothering ideology related to whether or not mothers work outside the home or spend the majority of their time nurturing the child's development (Miller, 2005; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Maternal ability to nurture the child may be affected by many other factors like maternal age, mental health, socioeconomic status, education, mother-child separations, culture, and support systems (Flagler, 1990; Mercer, 1981; Rubin, 1984) and relational factors. Research has typically focused on factors having an effect on the maternal

role. Other research examined mothering ideologies and the concept of the good mother or the troubled motherhood experience (Brown & Bloom, 2009; Miller, 2005); however, very little research has examined the processes of reclaiming the parenting role, and how the formerly incarcerated woman's relationship with her child's family caregiver may influence her sense of maternal identity.

4. Summary—Relational support and its influence on maternal identity

In earlier studies, Hairston (1992, 1995) acknowledged the importance of maternal support for incarcerated women. Recent studies also consider relational factors such as the history of prior relationships between the incarcerated mother and potential kin caregiver (Enos, 2001). An important part of a formerly incarcerated woman's reintegration experience revolves around support; however, not enough attention is given to the role of relational support in association with the formerly incarcerated woman's reformation of her maternal identity.

While this study considers relational support, O'Brien's (2001) study linked successful reintegration to positive social networks. Relational support has been defined as a relational process that encompasses feelings of affirmation and attention given to aspects of the personal relationship. The role of relational support can prove to be an invaluable resource for the mother attempting to reclaim the parenting role once released from prison.

The Stone Center writings (Jordan, 1997) focused on women's development as a relational process. Relational support may help to lessen the sense of social isolation of incarceration, promote positive coparenting, and assist the formerly incarcerated woman as she reclaims the role of parenting. Few studies consider how these relational processes may influence

maternal identity and the mother's ability to reclaim the parenting role. These are important factors in assisting mothers as they exit the prison system and attempt to reestablish familial ties and build rebuild important relationships.

5. Summary—Caregiving and coparenting

Mass incarceration affects the lives of families. When a mother goes to prison, the child's usual caregiver is the maternal grandmother (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Studies have found that assuming the responsibility of caring for the child places a great deal of stress on grandparents raising grandchildren (Daly & Glenwick, 2000; Mackintosh et al., 2006). One study found that grandparents are often reluctant to ask for assistance, which only increases their sense of isolation and low social support. Coparenting relationships, on the other hand, can potentially provide support to all—the caregiver, the biological parent, and the child.

Gleeson, Wesley, Ellis, Seryak, Talley, and Robinson (2009) conducted a study investigating reasons, motivations and pathways for caregiving. They found that caregivers were motivated due to familial obligations, family legacy, spiritual reasons, and love for the child. Kinship caregivers wanted to prevent children from going into foster care, protect the children, and ensure their sense of well-being and belonging. In addition, Gleeson and colleagues (2009) found that even when biological parents were not coresidents, they shared some caregiving responsibilities and the shared responsibilities were not automatic within multigenerational families. In summary, they found that the literature illuminates complex issues such as relational histories, quality of relationships, caregiver stress, and how the needs of all involved affect coparenting in multigenerational families.

6. Summary

Coparenting may be a precursor to the full reclamation of the parenting role. Due to its relational nature, it may influence the reformation of identity for the formerly incarcerated woman. The reclamation of the parenting role and identity reformation may also be affected by the general relationship over time.

In preparation for the research, I reviewed the literature regarding relational support, identity theory, and Black feminist epistemology. My interest was in learning more about the process of identity reformation postincarceration for African American women as a process of important entanglements, such as relational interactions between the formerly incarcerated mother and the caregiver and other contextual factors.

This study builds on the literature on formerly incarcerated women and informs practices to help women reclaim their parenting role. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the experiences of African American formerly incarcerated women as they resume parenting?
2. What do African American women believe is necessary for successful resumption of parenting after release from prison?
3. How does relational support and interaction with their child's family caregiver influence the former inmate's maternal identity?

III. QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I present the qualitative methods I used to conduct a study with formerly incarcerated African American women located in the Metropolitan Chicagoland area. The study was conducted over the course of five months—from June 2013 until late November 2013. This chapter is divided into six sections: (A) Research design, (B) Researcher's role and Black feminist epistemology and reflexivity, (C) Sampling procedures. (D) Data collection procedures and (E) Data analysis procedures.

A. Research Design

This exploratory study uses qualitative methods and examines the processes involved when African American women reclaim or attempt to reclaim their parenting role post-incarceration. In addition, this study sought to investigate the processes that influence formerly incarcerated women's reformation of maternal identity. The processes involved in reclaiming the parenting role are an important yet often underexamined aspect of the reintegration experience.

According to Hennick, Hutter and Bailey (2011) qualitative research is the umbrella term used to examine people's experiences in detail. This study uses an interpretive approach to understand the lived experiences of people from their own perspective also referred to as the emic or inside perspective. According to Hennick et al., qualitative research is used to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic, to understand the processes people experience, to study complex issues and to give voice to the participants. My research goal was to gain insight about the experiences of formerly incarcerated African American examine their processes of

reconnecting to parenting, elevate their voices and explore their views of their own maternal identity.

In designing this study I used a purposive sampling technique, i.e., maximum variation to obtain multiple perspectives of the research participants. Maximum variation is used to capture variation across participants to describe a wide range of perspectives relating to a research topic (Patton, 1990; Maykut & Moorehouse, 2002). I used maximum variation as a recruitment strategy to identify similarities and differences in participant experiences. The use of in-depth interviewing allowed me to describe a process in this case, the processes formerly incarcerated African American women experienced as they reclaimed their parenting role and re-formed their maternal identity as a relational process with their child's family caregiver.

For this study I designed a semistructured interview guide for in-depth interviewing of all participants. In addition to the semistructured guide, I completed a one-time member check focus group toward the end of the data collection process. The purpose of the member check focus group was to ensure that the researcher's interpretations accurately captured the women's experiences.

Furthermore, I used inductive and deductive forms of analysis. Inductive analysis was used because it is a well-established framework with rigor and it provides scientific organization for qualitative methods (Thomas, 2006). Deductive analysis refers to the use of a priori codes that are derived from the literature or theory or those prompted by the interview guide (Hennick, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). Deductive codes were prompted by the questions on the interview guide related to parenting, coparenting, maternal identity and the reconnection to the parent role.

In short, it is important to use the words of formerly incarcerated women in gaining insights about their experiences because few studies focus on the return to parenting after incarceration. Using a qualitative methods and a Black feminist epistemology offers an exploration of the parenting experience from the perspectives of African American women by an African American researcher.

B. Role of the Researcher: Black Feminist Epistemology and Reflexivity

As an African American feminist researcher it is important to consider the contextual similarities and differences in approaching one's research participants. As a woman, mother, and African American, I identify with this study's participants in those ways which may have enhanced my ability to establish a rapport with the participants. Nonetheless, as the African American experience cannot be considered monolithic, I assumed and indeed found that some areas were unfamiliar. First, I was humbled by the intense efforts of the women in my study to reunite with their children and by their insight into the processes of resuming the parent role. Second, I am not personally familiar with nor have I experienced any abuse, trauma, or male dominated violence. Third, although I have volunteered at Cook County Jail in Chicago, Illinois, serving in the capacity of a mitigation specialist, I have never been detained or separated from my children. Fourth, I cannot pretend to understand the experience of being without agency as I have always been encouraged to express myself. Nonetheless, I respectfully used my working and volunteering experiences within the criminal legal system as a basis of emerging familiarity for this study.

A Black feminist epistemological approach required me to employ reflexivity throughout this study. The continued examination of the participant's narratives, in comparison to my own experiences as an African American woman, allowed me to make critical inquiries while collecting and examining data. As I reflected on my life experiences as an African American woman and researcher, I was aware of the privilege education has afforded me, and I attempted to suspend judgments based only on my own experiences.

The feminist epistemological stance takes into consideration the reflexivity, which describes the fact that researchers do not stand apart in their research. Instead, they become a part of the process examined and may even create the reality they seek to describe (Jackson, 2006). Jackson further explicates the role of perceptions in feminist research when stating, "Therefore the researcher must always be aware of how perceptions of herself or himself alter the research" (p. 533) across class, race, age, education, and other social divisions.

It is apparent in the qualitative literature that researchers have become adept in the skills of stating one's position and biases upfront. As a woman of color and as a parent, differences existed that could have potentially interfered with my ability to engage the participants. Although I wondered if my lack of involvement in the criminal legal system would serve as a disincentive, I found that the participants were open and candid. I shared my interest in studying this topic with the participants and found that it was easy to establish a rapport with them.

I have been interested in criminal justice since my first volunteer experience during my undergraduate studies. I volunteered for the P.A.C.E. Institute through Cook County Jail, Chicago, where I counseled and tutored inmates. What stood out most was the fact that there

were no programs for women. I could not understand the disparity of services. In addition, my interest in this topic developed over time from prior work experiences in the criminal justice system. I worked at the Cabrini Green Legal Aid Clinic as an undergraduate intern and later as a mitigation specialist for the Murder Task Force in the Cook County Public Defender's Office. I used personal reflection and field notes to remain open to the participants' experiences in order to avoid the process of "othering" (Jensen, 2010, p. 64). As researcher, I used these strategies to relieve the disquieted aspects of my identity and to provide integrity to this study.

C. Sampling Procedures

This study used a purposive sampling strategy to gain access to formerly incarcerated African American women who reclaimed or attempted to reclaim the parenting role. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), purposive sampling is used for three primary reasons: (1) to capture the experiences of those who are typical of the population being studied; (2) to capture the experiences of those who are deviant or atypical with regard to a targeted population; and (3) to capture the experiences of those who are the exceptions to the rule, i.e., disconfirming cases. Qualitative research also assumes the selection of a small number of participants so that in-depth issues are further explored (Hennick, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). Twelve participants were selected using a purposive sampling strategy to provide maximum variation of experiences. Hennick, Hutter, and Bailey (2011) propose that participant recruitment in qualitative research is conducted in a nonrandomized manner; and participants are selected a priori based on specific characteristics and experiences that can contribute to a greater understanding of the studied phenomenon.

This study examined the experiences of formerly incarcerated women to gain a detailed account of the process of reclaiming parenting and reforming one's maternal identity post-incarceration. Based on my research questions, I used the following predetermined criteria to determine eligibility in this study and to maximize variation of the sample: (1) mothers who parented alone or shared parenting; (2) mothers with children from infancy to age 18; (3) mothers who have been incarcerated in prison as an adult, at least one year; (4) mothers who have been released more than one month (to ensure they are out of crisis mode), and less than three years (to enhance their ability to recall how they resumed the parent role); and (5) mothers who have been incarcerated in prison as an adult more than once. All participants reported having a child that was cared for by a relative caregiver during their incarceration and reported parenting their child(ren) prior to being incarcerated.

1. Recruitment

I recruited participants with the assistance of several agencies that serve formerly incarcerated women with 63 in the Chicago metropolitan area. I asked the agency contact person to post flyers within their respective agencies. Although agencies that serve women after incarceration are not neutral spaces, they are locations with which formerly incarcerated women have likely established relationships and trust. Fliers were posted at Lutheran Social Services, North Lawndale Employment Network, and Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers. Each agency signed its own Memorandum of Understanding, and the protocol application was approved on May 9, 2013 by the University of Illinois at Chicago's Institutional Review Board.

These collaborating agencies provide an array of services to women exiting the prison system. Lutheran Social Services (n.d., para 2) works with incarcerated mothers, women who are reentering the community, their children, and the children's caregivers in the Chicago area. Their Connections program helps link women to community resources, such as food pantries, job-training programs and substance abuse treatment services. North Lawndale Employment Network (n.d., para. 1) conducts job training to assist formerly incarcerated people—including wrap-around services. Finally, Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers (n.d.) works with incarcerated mothers to maintain the bond between mothers and their children.

Potential participants called the researcher for a telephone screening to learn more about the study and to determine eligibility to participate in this study. Once the researcher confirmed eligibility, an interview date was scheduled. The location of the interview was mutually determined but largely based on what made the participant the most comfortable.

2. Study Location/Research Setting

The interviews for this study were situated in an urban/metropolitan area in the Midwest—Chicago, Illinois. Several interviews were held in participants' homes; one interview and one member check was held at a local transitional living facility residence; several interviews were conducted in local libraries (e.g., Woodlawn Public Library and Halsted and the Thurgood Marshall Public Library located on Chicago's south side); and several were held at University of Illinois at Chicago, Jane Addams College of Social Work in a small conference room. The interviews were conducted with a good level of privacy and all but one interview was uninterrupted. No matter the location, the settings were inviting and unobtrusive.

3. Semistructured Interview Guide

I used a semistructured guide for the 12 interviews and audiotaped each one; later each one was transcribed verbatim. I transcribed the first three interviews and the last interview and I hired an outside person to transcribe the remaining 8 interviews. The semistructured interview guide (see Appendix E) included a list of demographic questions, semistructured questions to promote open-ended responses, and probes for each question. The average range for the length of the interviews was between 45 minutes to one hour. The interview was constructed based on three broad sections containing 18 questions. The first section explored the experiences of African American women and their child's relative caregiver with regard to the reclamation of the parenting role and the array of parenting experiences they had prior to incarceration. The second section explored the experiences of women post-incarceration as they reclaimed the parenting role. The third section explored aspects of relational processes and how relationships may influence maternal identity and the reclamation of the parenting role for the formerly incarcerated mother. I used interview probes to help clarify and expand answers when needed.

The demographic portion of the interview guide (see Appendix E) included an item that requested that the woman select a pseudonym. If the participant did not select a pseudonym however, one was chosen for her to guarantee that data remain de-identified. Demographic information included: contact information, education and income levels, marital or cohabitating status, number of minor age biological children with whom they were attempting to reconnect, amount of time they had been released, and employment status.

4. Participant Characteristics

The sample from this study consists of 12 formerly incarcerated African American women, all of whom are parents of at least one minor age child (age 17 or younger). The characteristics of the sample for this study (see Table I) presented a range of experiences: 5 of the 12 women had less than a high school education, 4 of the 12 women had a high school diploma or equivalency, and 3 of the 12 women reported taking some college courses. None of the women had completed college at the time of data collection. In terms of income, 5 of the 12 women reported having an income, 2 of the 12 women received public assistance, 1 woman received child support, and 1 woman received disability income. Two of the twelve (2 of 12) women were married at the time of the interview. More than half of the sample was single: 10 of the 12 women were single; of that number 5 were divorced and 3 reported that they never married, 2 were living with a same-sex partner.

D. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection consisted of gathering demographic data, interview narratives, and researcher data such as field notes, memos, and reflection logs. As the primary researcher, it was important to me to adhere to the consent process approved by the University of Illinois at Chicago's Institutional Review Board.

First, potential participants contacted the researcher on their own volition to express interest in this study. When potential participants called, I explained the research study to them over the phone, screened them using a recruitment script (see Appendix C) to determine if they

met the eligibility criteria from my study. Once participants were deemed eligible to participate, an interview date and time was scheduled.

Second, prior to the beginning of each interview participants received a handout that was written in non-technical language detailing the full aspects of the study. The consent process included having the potential research participant explain what he or she had read to make sure they understood why their consent was needed and what they could expect. I used basic questions to ensure that the participants were fully aware of what their participation entailed and that their participation was voluntary. The following questions were asked to make sure participants understood what was being asked of them:

1. “What are you being asked to do in this study?”
2. “What is the purpose of the study?”
3. “What are the consequences if you drop out?”

These questions helped gauge the participants’ level of understanding. None of the participants had any trouble understanding what was being asked of them; they were eager to participate and indicated that they were hopeful that their story would help the next person. After discussing the study’s purpose, risks, and benefits, all participants were asked to sign a letter of consent. After obtaining consent, the researcher gave participants a \$20.00 Visa gift card to thank them for participating.

Third, as a researcher, I realize the importance of protecting participants from psychological harm. I informed participants that if they experienced any distress, I would stop the interview. Further, participants were provided with a referral list for counseling. The

researcher is a licensed clinical social worker with over 15 years' clinical experience and extensive education and supervision in clinical training. Every effort was made to minimize possible risks from discussing their experiences related to their incarceration and parenting. All participants expressed themselves without any noticeable signs of distress, expressing that they enjoyed participating in this study.

Fourth, to further protect participant's identity, I maintained all files in a locked file cabinet and the audiotapes in another separately locked file cabinet. Transcribed interviews were all de-identified and only contain the pseudonym of the participant.

Consistent with qualitative methods, data was collected from in-person, semistructured, in-depth interviews. An additional layer of contact was provided by conducting one face-to-face member check focus group in November 2013. The data collection period extended from July 2013 until November 2013 when theoretical and thematic saturation was reached.

1. Theoretical Saturation

Theoretical saturation refers to the point at which the findings become redundant. In other words, saturation was reached when I gathered data to the point of diminishing returns, when nothing new was added to the themes identified in the participants' narratives. I sought to confirm the point of saturation by reflecting on how well the research questions were answered and by determining how much the themes were repeating. I used the software program ATLAS.ti (Muhr, 2012) to analyze the narrative data and to detect that no new themes were emerging from the data.

According to Hennick, Hutter and Bailey (2011), theoretical saturation occurs when the researcher collects data that becomes redundant and the researcher has captured the variation and context of participant experiences. I continually examined the ATLAS.ti hermeneutic unit to analyze the frequencies of themes, examine how deeply they repeated and examined the association of one theme to another.

2. Member Checking

I used a member check (see Appendix G) to clarify my interpretations of the data. The selection process for the member check focus group was based on selecting those individuals who were willing to participate and those who were available to meet at the prescribed time. As a way of increasing participation during the member check phase, the researcher requested alternative telephone numbers after realizing that the women may become transient and unreachable if too much time elapsed. More than one attempt was necessary to coordinate the member check focus group. One participant had already moved out of the area, another was experiencing conflict in scheduling due to a sick relative, and another failed to show for her scheduled appointment one week prior and on the actual date of the member check that was conducted.

The focus group member check session was held at Grace House—a residential program for women who are returning citizens. Women participating in the focus group were given a \$15.00 Visa gift card for their time. In addition, I used a member check script (see Appendix G) during the member check focus group. The member check progressed smoothly and with no interruptions. The women verified my interpretations about the data related to the following

themes: (1) desires for children, (2) maternal identity, and (3) transition back to the parenting role. Moreover, the member check participants verified my interpretations about their wishes for their children, my interpretations about maternal identity and my interpretations about their experiences related to the parenting role. They also confirmed my interpretations about their transitioning back to parenting as a process, one that requires time for them as well as their child or children to readjust; and realized the importance of support/resources and of accepting their children's feelings about the separation as part of the process.

E. Data Analysis Procedures

I incorporated the tenets of Hennick, Hutter, and Bailey (2011), which describe the process of qualitative data analysis using principles of grounded theory, as well as inductive and deductive elements of analyses. The inductive approach allows for research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in the raw data. The deductive approach allows the researcher to incorporate a priori (*pre-determined*) content areas found in the literature as logical starting points (Hennick, Hutter & Bailey) for methodological inquiry. According to these scholars, “deductive strategies are used to spur the development of inductive codes, to help recognize specific concepts, cultural references or contextual issues in the data” (Hennick, Hutter & Bailey, 2011, p. 219). Hennick, Hutter and Bailey also suggest that deductive codes be used in moderation because they do not allow the data to speak for itself; therefore a mixture of inductive and deductive codes is recommended.

Data analysis involves the identification of repeating themes, commonalities and differences as well as being able to reduce data when identified categories are shown to have less density. In addition it is important to situate the data in a meaningful and organized way – determining how the data fit together. Hennick, Hutter, and Bailey (2011) propose the following steps in qualitative data analysis: (1) Data preparation, (2) code development, (3) creating a codebook, (4) evaluating the quality of the codes, and (5) checking for transparency and interpretive validity.

Data preparation requires careful attention to specific tasks as outlined in Hennick, Hutter and Bailey (2011). These authors suggest transcribing the audio-recorded interviews verbatim, and de-identifying the data to preserve participant anonymity. The following steps were taken to prepare the data for analysis.

1. Data Preparation

I began data preparation by transcribing the first three audio recorded interviews and the last interview (the 12th) verbatim. The Institutional Review Board gave the approval for me to hire a transcriptionist. The transcriptionist transcribed the audio recorded interviews 4–11 verbatim under my training and supervision. Also, I de-identified data by removing all identifying information (*names, locations, places, or specific information that might reveal the participant's identity*) of each transcribed interview. Once the audio taped interviews were transcribed I uploaded them into the ATLAS.ti software and created a hermeneutic unit (Muhr, 2012; Friese, 2012) for my entire research project.

2. Code Development

The transcripts were read and re-read to fully immerse myself in the data, to clarify themes, define and identify possible similarities or differences in participants' narratives and theories from the literature. In keeping with the process of inductive analysis, I prepared the raw data by cleaning and organizing it to fit my chosen coding format. Second, I read the text in detail until I became familiar with its content. Third, I organized the data into repeating chunks using descriptive and interpretive coding. Fourth, I examined overlapping coding and uncoded text to make sure a good fit existed with the overall research questions. Fifth, I performed continual revisions and refinement of the category system. I coded and re-coded data to refine the list of categories and developed subcategories as needed. As relationships became evident, core categories were used to construct a theoretical narrative from the data. The abovementioned steps are necessary to identify the range of issues raised in the data (Hennick, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011) and leads to understanding participant narratives in the raw data.

I analyzed and coded the narrative data in the transcripts using the latest ATLAS.ti 7.0 software (Muhr, 2012). ATLAS.ti allowed me to identify properties within the coded data. For example, I noticed associations in several codes that were condensed into one code thereby creating a higher order code, i.e., parenting transition. I further refined this category of parenting transition by creating subthemes within the code to fully capture participant experiences related to their descriptions of transitioning back to the parent role.

In addition, using ATLAS.ti software, I ran several analyses to determine how well established themes were across all transcripts. Using the code manager and network function in

ATLAS.ti I reviewed the coded segments of data and identified associations of one code to another. I continued to review all initial codes that showed a high level of frequency to determine how meaningful these pieces of data were to the participant's narrative. I reviewed the frequency level of codes and transcripts again to determine salience for each code. Salience was determined by a groundedness score (ATLAS.ti term which refers to the frequency in which the code appears in the transcripts) of 20 or above and the intensity level of the participant response.

The next step was to develop inductive codes in the data using the range of issues raised by participants. Initially I identified at least one third of the themes from the data as suggested by Hennick, Hutter and Bailey (2011). I continued with code development and made numerous attempts to reduce the data as an iterative process. I also continued to monitor the themes in order to detect when I was reaching a point of saturation, meaning the point at which no new data were revealed.

I also examined the codes in relation to the research questions that were posed thus creating a deductive coding structure. Deductive codes were selected by the questions in the interview guide and those emanating from the literature review. Examples of deductive codes, from the literature and interview protocol, are maternal identity, African American women's experiences, resuming parenting, and coparenting. I used the query tool in ATLAS.ti to verify that the codes addressed the research questions (Chapter IV – Findings).

The last step in coding was in developing overarching categories for the themes based on my assumptions and develop an interpretive model or framework based on these interpretations. I examined aspects of the literature review and conceptual framework in the analysis of the

themes, which will be addressed in the discussion section. Moreover, I used the direct quotes of participants in order to convey their experiences and highlight meaning for them.

Coding according to Hennick, Hutter and Bailey (2011) is a process whereby one third of the data are read to develop codes; however I coded as an iterative and comparative process in order to create common classifications. I read more than the recommended one third in order to develop my codes. I read 6 transcripts to develop the codes and added new ones if the theme appeared to have deep meaning for the participant. Hennick, Hutter and Bailey also suggest that if all codes are not captured the researcher may add more codes later in the project. In addition, the code list was refined and strengthened as I wrote memos, reviewed my field notes and looked at networks or associations between emerging themes. I also conducted an examination of the properties and meanings of the codes to refine subcategories. Codes and categories were sorted, compared, and contrasted until saturation was reached.

In summary, the use of inductive analysis employs a method of systematic and constant comparison. The process of inductive analysis entails an examination of emergent themes based on interview data, reexamining these themes and checking them for accuracy, fitting the data into new categories or thematic constructions, and developing or extending theory based on a rigorous data analysis.

3. Creating a Codebook

As themes emerged, I created a codebook (see Appendix H) to list all relevant code labels and provide definitions for themes that were being identified as codes. I continued to further refine codes as an iterative activity throughout the process of analyzing the data.

ATLAS.ti helped to organize the codes in its Code Manager function. I was able to create definitions as codes were developed and refined.

4. Evaluating the Quality of the Codes

As codes developed, I evaluated the quality of the codes by checking for the point of saturation, and the appropriateness of strategies (interviews, transcriptions, and consistency in coding). I reviewed my research questions to ensure that all the questions had been answered and I reviewed transcripts to make sure no new themes had emerged that were not yet taken into consideration.

The ATLAS.ti software (Muhr, 2012) helped me develop connecting structures and thematic relationships. Data were analyzed, allowing for recurring and emergent themes to develop, then compared in a consistent and rigorous manner throughout this study, and finally compared with my theoretical framework.

5. Checking for transparency and interpretive validity

Qualitative researchers rely on trustworthiness in their research. Providing detailed descriptions of data preparation and code development as I have done displays transparency related to one's methodology and interpretive validity (member check) to assure trustworthiness and authenticity of the data (Hennick, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). Member checks add to trustworthiness by taking into account the participants' opinions during the course of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Member checks also serve both as a means to avoiding researcher bias and as a demarcation of a shift in authority—from researcher as the consummate expert to one of shared authority. I used one member check focus group to check for credibility and accuracy of

interpretation. I asked participants at the time of the interview if they were willing to be contacted for a member check. Based on their willingness to be a part of the member check focus group, I contacted four of the participants two weeks prior to the scheduled member check. The first scheduled member check was cancelled after one member forgot it was scheduled and did not show up. In the second attempt to conduct a member check, the same three participants agreed to meet at a residential facility where two of the three women were residing at the time—but the third participant failed to show for the appointment again. The interview was conducted as scheduled with the participants who were available at that time. The women who participated had full schedules as they were actively seeking employment, in school, and spending weekends away from the facility. I proceeded with a smaller number for the focus group because waiting would not be feasible.

I read the member check confidentiality statement (see Appendix F) to the participants and used the member check script (see Appendix G). The participants agreed not to discuss the contents of the member check with anyone else and were asked to respect the opinion of one another; and they agreed. They were asked questions in an informal manner about several thematic categories to check the researcher's interpretation. I took notes by hand as the participants responded and provided Post-it® paper to the participants for writing notes. However, the participants chose not to use the paper and instead, spoke freely. The women expressed a sense of comfort with one another and were able to address the items from a more universal rather than individualistic perspective.

In addition, I wrote reflexive field notes at the conclusion of each individual interview to make note of observations made in the field. Field notes provide a record of observations of the environment within the interview setting and help to provide consistency in the analytic process. As I reflected on the field notes, a few recurring themes became apparent. Most of the interviews were in the early hours of the day so the women dressed in nice attire (business casual), were very polite, were prompt, and were happy to share their experiences. Each participant was relatively easy to engage and seemed to take the process seriously as evidenced by them showing up on time and remaining focused. Further, nearly all of the participants thanked the researcher for interviewing them. The women also shared that participating provided a way for them to help the next person—referring to the next formerly incarcerated woman who may be able to benefit from hearing their stories.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to the notion of transferability of findings. Transferability in qualitative research demonstrates that the findings apply to other settings or contexts. Transferability, in this sense, ensures that another researcher may use the detail in a way that is transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people to other contexts. The researcher promotes transferability by making sure the context of the fieldwork site is well explained. Lincoln and Guba (1985) further assert that transferability may be attained by providing a thick description of the research phenomenon. I extracted thick descriptions from the narrative data of the semistructured interviews of formerly incarcerated women. Chapter IV, which follows, includes excerpts from formerly incarcerated women as they describe their experiences of reclaiming their parenting role, reforming their maternal identity, and the

processes between themselves and their child's family caregiver. Although the sample is small and may not be generalizable to a larger population of formerly incarcerated African American women, it provides meaning about the context of the women who lived these experiences.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to dependability in qualitative research in place of the quantitative concept of reliability. Creating an audit trail is one way of showing dependability. An audit trail helps to provide transparency by documenting each step in the data collection and analysis process. I used self-reflective memo writing to document progress throughout the writing process to demonstrate the dependability of my reported research findings. I also created a code book to provide additional methodological rigor in the research process. The code book helped to establish dependability in the analytic process of data analysis and provided definitions of the identified themes.

This study's findings are directly linked to the data according to qualitative methods, which in turn serves as a sign of confirmability. Findings generated in this study are systematically and methodically linked back to the data. Chapters IV and V include ample direct quotes, which were used to corroborate the interpretation of the narrative data.

In addition, I used methodological logs, an internal process, in order to record reflective insights. Consistent with O'Brien's (2001) method of recording personal reflections, I recorded my own interpretive hunches in ATLAS.ti using memos along with considering theoretical questions and research events (field notes) to provide a trail for auditability. This technique aids the researcher in systematically revisiting what has been recorded previously that may have led to an interpretation. The interpretation can then be reexamined by using the previously recorded

reflection to better understand how the interpretation was derived, thereby creating a provision for checking the data for accuracy. This helps to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

Another tool that helped to enhance this study's trustworthiness was the emic (or insider's position) in using the Black feminist epistemological lens to help frame this study's design. Furthermore, I was able to engage with the participants quickly, which implies a level of trust and rapport building that was perhaps predicated on my experience as a social work clinician and having a shared history of being an African American, a mother, and a woman.

Several steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of this study. I framed this study so it allowed for participants to freely and openly respond to the research questions. Using a semistructured interview guide allowed thick descriptions to be captured. In addition, the interview guide was intentionally designed to minimize response fatigue from including too many questions. Instead, probes were used as a way of gaining more insight about responses that may have been misunderstood or at the surface level.

IV. FINDINGS

Next, I provide a brief introduction of this study's participants based on demographic information, interviews and field notes. Following the participant descriptions is a presentation of my findings. A summary of the participants' demographic information is found in Table I.

A. Summary of the Study's Participants

A total of 12 formerly incarcerated African American mothers participated in interviews for this study. The sample for this study was typical of the general population of incarcerated African American women. The participants ranged in age from 30 – 50, all had minor age children ranging in age from 2 months to 17 years of age, more than half were educated from 9th grade to G.E.D. (9)—with only three having some college course work, 1 participant worked and the remainder had financial support from various sources and most spent less than three years in prison. Two participants reported being incarcerated multiple times. At the time of interviews, six of the participants were single and divorced, four were single and never married; two were married. Regarding caregivers for children during their mother's incarceration, six of the kin caregivers were grandparents, three were biological fathers, and four were other family members. One of the care providers changed caregivers therefore the total count is 13. Only four of the eight women engaged in coparenting relationships post release had coparenting arrangements. The majority (n=8) of participants spent less than three years in prison, three were incarcerated for three years and one participant was in prison for five years. At the time I conducted the interviews, the amount of time since release from prison ranged from 1 month to three years. Seven of the women learned about this study from Lutheran Social Services (LSS),

two from Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers (CLAIM), and three from North Lawndale Employment Network NLEN).

TABLE I**SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS**

Characteristic	Frequency
Education	
Less than H.S.	5
H.S. or GED	4
Some College	3
Income	
Employment	1
None	7
Child Support	1
Disability	1
Public Aid	2
Number of Children	
1	3
2	5
3	3
5	1
Marital Status	
Married	2
Single/Never Married	3
Single/Divorced	5
Living with Partner	2
Family Caregiver	
Biological Father	3
Grandparent/Maternal	4
Grandparent/Paternal	2
Maternal Aunt	1
Paternal Aunt ¹	2
Daughter	1
Coparenting Status Post Release	
Biological Father ¹	4
Grandparent/Maternal	2
Aunt/Maternal	2

Daughter	1
None	4
Time in Prison	
1 year or more	4
2 years or more	4
3 years or more	3
5 years or more	1
Amount of Time Since Release	
1 month	1
2 – 6 months	4
6 months – 1 year	4
1 year – 1.5 years	2
3 years	1

¹Characteristic for the participant is counted as a dual item, e.g., two kin caregivers.

The sample in my study may be atypical in the following ways, (1) they self-selected to be a part of my study, (2) participants had well established relationships with their child(ren)'s kin caregiver before, during and after incarceration, (3) they were already attached to a program that serves incarcerated women and (4) they were engaged in positive behaviors to help in their adjustments to reconnecting with their children and reentering the community. It is difficult to determine which came first: the participants' motivation to involve themselves in such programs or the effect of the program in delivering services. Despite this difference there were atypical participants who reported the use of *protective parenting* which is an adaptive strategy for protecting their children during their drug use prior to receiving any intervention.

The sample of women may also be different from women who report having relationship strain as the participants reported having good relationships with their children and child(ren)'s kin caregivers. The women in my study reported having good relationships throughout the course of their involvement in the criminal legal system.

B. Introduction to the Study's Participants

Davina

Davina is a petite African American woman with a non-gender conforming style of dress. Davina came to the interview dressed in an oversized black t-shirt, jeans and a baseball cap. She is soft spoken and pleasant; she engenders empathy and is easy to engage.

Davina spent the last two years in prison and was released three months prior to the interview. Davina shared that this was her second conviction; the first time she was incarcerated

for 9 months. Davina was paroled to the home of her adoptive sister, who was also the kin caregiver for her two daughters, ages 7 and 4.

Davina completed the 11th grade. At the time of the interview, Davina was seeking employment and hoping to win a law suit for the treatment she received during childbirth at the County Hospital while detained in the Department of Corrections before going to prison. According to Davina, she was hand cuffed during labor and delivery of her younger daughter.

Davina and her twin brother, now deceased, were adopted by her maternal aunt and uncle. She has experienced a few losses as her twin brother, adoptive mother and father, and biological older brother have all passed away. Her adoptive sister, with whom she was living has uncontrolled diabetes mellitus and is losing her eyesight. The relative caregiver for Davina's children was her mother. After her mother passed away, her adoptive sister took on the caregiving role for her daughters and continues to support Davina and her children during reentry.

Bianca

Bianca is an upbeat African American woman who was comfortable from the start of the interview. She smiled a lot and appeared happy to participate in the interview. Bianca was open and easy to engage. Bianca was incarcerated for three years and at the time of this interview had been released from prison for three years. Bianca is married and lives with her husband, mother-in-law, and two minor age children (6 and 15) on the near north side of Chicago.

Bianca completed the 9th grade and stated that she would like to obtain her GED. She was unemployed and receiving public assistance at the time of the interview. During the week she volunteers at her son's school.

Bianca has an older set of children who were all adopted by her maternal aunt. Bianca has given birth to 14 children, 10 of whom are alive and range in age from six to 28. Bianca's husband is the biological father of her 6 year old son. Her 13 year old daughter was adopted by a foster family when she was 3 months old.

Bianca indicated that her youngest child is developmentally delayed. Bianca gave birth to her six year old son prior to going to prison. Her mother-in-law, who was the kin caregiver, did not detect that the child was lagging in terms of his development. According to Bianca, her son's speech was not progressing normally which led her to question his development. Bianca stated that she knew "something" was not quite right and her other children were more advanced by his age.

As a result, Bianca reached out to his physician who identified him as needing special services and early intervention. Currently, her son receives intervention and his motor activity and overall development have improved. Bianca reported that her family was fairly well bonded until she became overwhelmed by her drug use. She believes her children may resent her for being incarcerated and she does not want them to feel this way. Bianca further indicated that she fears that their resentment will lead them to repeating some of the mistakes she has made in her life.

Capri

Capri is an African American woman who was well groomed and had a youthful appearance. She had micro-braids, her eyebrows were beautifully sculpted (as if they had been freshly waxed) and she was nicely but casually dressed. Capri was talkative and appeared happy to tell her story.

Capri was incarcerated for three years. She had been released for two months at the time of the interview. At the time of the interview Capri was living in a transitional facility that provided reentry services and support.

Capri completed the 11th grade. She is unemployed and has no source of income. Capri stated that one of her immediate goals in the reentry program is to secure a job and stable housing. Capri is a divorced mother of 5 children. Two of the 5 children are of minor age – one is 14 and the other one is 17. According to Capri, these two children were cared for by her 14 year old child's biological father and paternal grandparents while she was incarcerated. She has been divorced for 16 years. Since her release, Capri shares parenting responsibilities of her 14 year old child with her own biological parents. She visits her children on weekends when she has a pass to travel from the transitional facility where she resides.

Lynette

Lynette is a tall, African American woman, who was nicely groomed and casually dressed. She was pleasant and hospitable as this interview was conducted in her home in a small kitchenette area. Lynette was well spoken and glowed when she talked about the unique characteristics of her three children. In the kitchen, on the refrigerator were a number of items

such as a picture of her youngest daughter, art work and other school related materials. Lynette was pleasant and easy to engage.

Lynette was incarcerated for 2 years and 7 months and had been released for 7 months at the time of this interview. According to Lynette, she completed the 9th grade. Lynette receives social security disability.

Lynette has three minor age children (5, 7, and 10). Lynette has one child with attention deficit with hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and another who had been diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). She was married for approximately ten years and has now been divorced for the same amount of time. She is currently single and living with her three minor age children in a small apartment on the Southside of Chicago.

Eden

Eden is a slightly tall African American woman with a slender build. She arrived for the interview on time at UIC and was dressed in summer clothing as the heat index was particularly high this day. She was pleasant, congenial and fairly easy to engage. Eden indicated she had been incarcerated for 3 years. Eden had been released for 7 months at the time of the interview. She was living in a transitional facility and participating in reentry services to help her secure employment and housing.

Eden reported that she received her GED; and she was currently working on getting a degree in Christian counseling. Eden talked about the importance of being educated; she accumulated training certificates during her incarceration. According to Eden she sent the

certificates home to make her children aware of her accomplishments. Eden currently has no job and no source of income.

Eden is the mother of 5 children. She has one 9 year old daughter and four adult children. Eden was married for two years and reports that her husband filed for divorce after she was sentenced to prison. During her three year incarceration, her ex-husband was the caregiver of her youngest child and is the custodial parent as a result of the divorce.

Alexis

Alexis is an African American woman who came to the interview dressed neatly in business casual attire wearing a navy blue vest. She was polite, articulate and business minded as she immediately extended a hand shake upon meeting me. Alexis was open, candid and easy to engage. Alexis was sentenced to 2 years in prison but was released in 1 ½ years due to participating in an adult work release program. At the time of the interview she had been released for 2 months. Alexis was living at home with her parents and two children.

Alexis has a high school diploma and has completed some college courses. She was not degree seeking but may be interested in childhood development. Alexis also indicated that she did not know the number of credit hours she had accumulated.

Alexis explained that although she worked at McDonald's during her work release program she did not seek employment there upon her return home. In fact, Alexis indicated that she hated working at McDonald's but knew that it would help her reach her goal of returning home. At the time of the interview Alexis was actively looking for employment that would give her an opportunity for upward mobility. Alexis lives with her biological parents and two minor

age children, a 13 year old son and an 11 year old daughter. Her children were cared for by her parents during her incarceration.

Alexis has the type of personality that made her go the extra mile. She read a lot of literature on parenting and child development; breast fed her oldest child for two years. She also discussed her struggle with postpartum depression and her challenge accessing treatment which is highlighted later in the findings section.

Trina

Trina is a well-dressed African American woman. During the interview she was polite and soft spoken. Trina was easy to engage but concise in her presentation. Trina was incarcerated for 5 years. She had been released one year and was living with her mother at the time of the interview. Trina has completed her GED. Trina has limited means; she is currently unemployed and has no source of income. Trina did not share her plans for future employment but did state a desire to further her education.

Trina has four children. Three of her four children are ages 6, 7, and 9 years old. Two of the three minor age children and one of her older sons currently live with her and her mother.

Trina reported that she shares parenting responsibilities with her mother. According to Trina, her mother was the caregiver of her children while she was incarcerated. Trina and her children have a good relationship with her mother. According to Trina, she knew that her children would be well looked after if they were in the care of her mother.

Cherri

Cherri is a tall and slender African American woman with a youthful appearance.

Cherri was dressed in casual clothing and had visible tattoos on her wrists and arms. Cherri was easy to engage and appeared interested in the interview as she listened intently before answering.

Cherri was incarcerated for 1 year and 2 months. At the time of the interview she had been out of prison for 11 months. Cherri had an apartment and was living alone with her children. Cherri did not report the highest grade she completed. She did however; state that she obtained a GED. Her sole source of income is child support in the amount of \$2,200 per month. According to Cherri her child support payments continued during her incarceration.

Cherri is the mother of five minor age children (sixteen, thirteen, six, four, and two months of age). While Cherri was incarcerated, her children's family caregiver changed because of what she described as the misuse of funding. Cherri stated that her step sister did not spend the money she sent to provide for her children; instead she supposed her step-sister used the funds for herself. After learning about her step sister's misuse of money meant for childcare, Cherri changed kin caregivers. Despite having a strained relationship with her biological mother she asked her to care for her children.

Janice

Janice is a slightly tall woman with African American and mixed heritage. Janice was dressed in leisurely sports attire. She was polite and easy to engage. Janice reported that she was incarcerated for 3 years and 1 month. At the time of the interview she had been released for 1 year and 3 months. Janice was living in an apartment with her partner and 7 year old son.

Janice has a GED and has completed some college. She has been attending classes at a junior college but was not enrolled in a degree seeking program. Janice's immediate plans were

to continue taking classes and seek employment in the future.

Janice has two sons, one age 5 and the other age 7. Her younger 5 year old son has lived with his biological father since her incarceration. The couple made this arrangement at the time of her sentencing. Subsequently, Janice and her husband have divorced. Janice reported that she was working on reestablishing her relationship with her children. She spends weekends with her younger son; she wanted them to spend time together as a family unit.

Janice was living with her same sex partner and has been in a stable relationship for the past 2 years. According to Janice she and her partner have a solid relationship and she finds her extremely helpful and supportive.

Harris

Harris is an African American young woman of average height. She was dressed in comfortable leisure wear. She had worked the night before and had gotten off early that morning so we met at her mother's south side home. Harris appeared to be tired but was alert and engaged during the interview.

Harris was incarcerated for 1 year and 10 months and had been released for one month and seven days at the time of the interview. Harris was living in an apartment with her fiancé and three year old son.

Harris indicated the highest grade she completed was her first year in college. She works at a factory where she earns approximately \$1,200 per month. The job was fairly new which made her uncertain about her exact income.

Harris currently lives with her fiancé, her son's biological father. Harris stated that she has a good relationship with her fiancé. She further indicated that her fiancé cared for their son during her incarceration. Harris reports that she and fiancé are in a good coparenting relationship.

Lisa

Lisa is an African American woman of average height. She came to the interview dressed in casual summer clothing and was polite and easy to engage. Lisa also inquired about other research she may be able to take part in at UIC.

Lisa had been incarcerated for one year and she had been released for a month and a half at the time of the interview. She has a GED but did not state the highest grade completed. Lisa had no source of income.

Lisa is a mother of, a 14 year old daughter. She does not have legal custody of her daughter but expressed an interest in reestablishing a relationship with her. Lisa reported that her sister-in-law has custody of her daughter. Furthermore because she and her sister-in-law have a strained relationship, she is unable to see her daughter.

Juana

Juana is a petite African American woman with a soft-spoken voice and pleasant demeanor. She arrived on time for her interview at UIC and was dressed in casual attire. She responded to the interview questions with a degree of depth. Although I did not ask, Juana identified herself as a lesbian.

Juana was incarcerated for one year and had been released from prison for 5 months at the time of this interview. She was living in a recovery home and had not yet reunited with her

children. Although Juana is in a recovery program, she did not share any programmatic goals for securing employment in the future. Juana completed the 10th grade and had no source of cash income but was enrolled in a food assistance program through the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Link program.

Juana is a mother of eight children, three of which are of minor age (7, 14, and 16 year olds). Juana's 16 and 14 year old were adopted by another family member. The relationship between Juana and her children's kin caregiver is currently estranged so she has not been able to have visitation with her 16 and 14 year old daughters. However, according to Juana her 16 and 14 year old daughters make contact with her on their own since they are old enough to do so. Nonetheless, the relationship with her daughter, who is the kin caregiver for her 7 year old son, remains intact. This relationship has facilitated her ability to spend a lot of time with her 7 year old son.

C. Thematic Findings

In this section, I present this study's findings from the analysis that has produced six themes. The themes are representative of the women's experiences with the resumption of parenting post-incarceration. The six themes found within the narratives are: (1) History of Abuse and Loss, (2) Caregiver Trust, (3) Parenting Transition (4) Coparenting Post Release, (5) Maternal Identity and (6) Support.

I developed the themes by using thematic analysis and constant comparison. First, I read each transcript for content. I further familiarized myself with the interview content by rereading each transcript in ATLAS.ti and conducting initial line-by-line coding. I assigned

preliminary codes to themes that appeared salient to the text. I determined salience based on the participant's depth of content which was later confirmed by an analysis of codes for intensity and groundedness. After reading the transcripts, I continued re-reading the assigned codes and refining them based on my examination of commonalities and differences. This process of systematic and constant comparison (Bowen, 2008) allowed me to further refine codes and eliminate preliminary codes that did not prove to be representative of at least 4 of the participants in this sample.

In using constant comparison, I examined each interview individually and later created a grid of themes to compare the salience of the themes within and between participants or as individual and shared experiences. The codes were further refined by defining them, examining networks/connections and renaming them. In addition, I used groundedness to determine the significance of that theme across all interviews. Groundedness is a term used in ATLAS.ti which provides a count of the data units represented within the hermeneutic unit or project. For this analysis, I analyzed themes for groundedness to determine to what extent identified themes in the data are represented across all interviews. Groundedness is important as it aids the researcher in determining how frequently specific pieces of data are identified in each emergent theme. To further decide on the grounding of each theme, I chose themes that represented at least four of the twelve participants or one third of the sample that were also relevant to the research questions. In the following section I describe each theme, define it and provide direct quotes from participant interviews illustrating the theme and subtheme respectively.

1. History of Abuse and Loss

History of abuse and loss refers to the descriptions given by women in this study regarding their pre-incarceration experiences related to abuse. The theme history of abuse and loss is derived from the direct quotes from the transcribed interviews with the participants in this study. The groundedness score for this theme is 29, representing quotes from 6 of the 12 women.

Although the theme is not represented among the entire sample, the narratives associated with this theme provide a rich description of their past experiences. I identified several subthemes stemming from the larger theme of history of abuse and loss such as sexual abuse, intimate partner violence and loss. Sexual abuse and intimate partner violence are forms of gendered violence. Sexual abuse is a subtheme that appeared salient for two participants: Capri experienced sexual abuse as a minor age child and intimate partner violence as an adult. Lisa described the sexual abuse of her daughters, whom she lost to the child welfare system as a consequence of the abuse. Lisa's example relates to both the sexual abuse and loss. Loss as a subtheme effects at least 5 of the 12 women in this sample.

Capri reported that it was her mother's boyfriend who sexually abused her and her sister when they were just teenagers. She recalled feeling disappointed by her mother's response when she failed to stop seeing the man who was her abuser. Despite feelings of disappointment, Capri articulated an understanding of her mother's plight.

I was molested several times; I told my mom. My mom was in an abusive relationship at the time by the person who was doing the molesting. (Capri)

In addition, Capri expressed a sense of loss of safety and security, she further stated, [I] “needed her protection that I didn’t get; and some explanation.” Capri further explained her abuse in a way that suggests the depth of her trauma and its effect on her family of origin.

It happened a lot. I told her – nothing happened. I used to see this man ... going to get her and she still continued to see this [him] and I have brothers by this man. I wanted somebody to know and understand why I felt the way I felt. I wasn’t just being mean or you know, manipulative or nothing of that [nature]It was their choice to not have anything to do with him. (Capri)

Capri wanted justice as a teenager; and as an adult she wants to understand why her mother did not stop seeing the man who molested her daughters. Capri did not report that she or her family ever sought counseling or support nor did she suggest any charges were ever brought against the alleged perpetrator. Instead, Capri describes her family’s coping as insular; her family members had individual responses to the allegations of the abuse. Capri’s adult half-brothers have rendered their own judgment as evidenced by her report that they have stopped speaking to their father, the perpetrator of her sexual abuse.

When asked about her parenting experiences, Capri augmented her response by explaining how she met her ex-husband and how she felt alone and vulnerable. Capri also became visibly more relaxed after sharing her story with me; her shoulders and face relaxed.

According to Capri, meeting her ex-husband at a time when she was vulnerable and had let her defenses down:

I got married at a young age; I was 22, I had had my first two children and was pregnant with my third when I met my husband; their father [is] deceased – the oldest girls’ father. I moved into a nice apartment on the north side of Chicago ...paying like \$42.00 [a month]. It was a low income apartment I had gotten in Old Town Gardens, and... this

gentleman – on a regular day basis – [we] got to know... one another [and] ...ended up starting a relationship... I was vulnerable at the time... [after] losing the oldest kids' father. (Capri)

Capri further indicated that her relationship with her ex-husband during her marriage was abusive and, in some ways, led to her eventual substance abuse. The context of her drug use unfolded spontaneously:

I got tired of the beatings; it ... got to be very dangerous, to [the point] where ... different weapons ...were used or I couldn't walk or I couldn't be seen. [I continued] going to school with black eyes. I was determined to finish my CNA[certified nursing assistant] – which I did with black eyes... (Capri)

Capri's story of abuse was also connected to her explanation of the context preceding her substance use:

The last time I put him in the rehab, you know this particular day he had left drugs in my bedroom on a saucer. I took it him ... for some rehab. I came back and I picked it up. I picked it up to use it and that's how my drug use got started. ... I figured trying it was gonna be nothing. I end up liking what I tried and figured – well I can do this from time to time – use it as a recreation –...and in my mind, that's what I kept [thinking] –it's just [for] recreation – I'm not abusing it... I continued to take care of my home[and] my kids but I started seeing myself going to buy it...sneaking to buy it. (Capri)

Capri also expressed feelings of disappointment and bewilderment by her mother's inability to protect her from being sexually abused repeatedly. Capri reported that she experienced trauma in early childhood that had a lasting effect on her. She described a childhood trauma that may have been a precursor to her drug abuse which ultimately led to her being incarcerated.

For two women in this study, Capri as noted above and Lisa who is highlighted in the narrative below, unresolved issues of sexual abuse had an effect on their relationships and/or

perceptions of motherhood.

The experience of trauma for Lisa was as an adult. Contextualizing Lisa's complex experiences about losing her children to the child welfare system and its effect on her own mental status and identity as "mother" is important. For this mother, in particular, her trauma experience differed from the other participants as Lisa's trauma is related to the sexual abuse of her two young daughters.

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services took protective custody of Lisa's daughters after investigating the allegation of child sexual abuse. The children were then placed with their paternal aunt in a formal foster care arrangement. Lisa was later diagnosed with bipolar depression which she believes is related to losing custody of her children. In Lisa's narrative, she describes the ways in which these events led to her having a "nervous breakdown". Lisa described her experience as a parent whose children were molested and subsequently led to her parental rights being terminated:

I had a nervous breakdown after this happened... cause I feel like I failed my children and that's how my children ended up in the system. (Lisa)

In addition, Lisa expressed a suppressed sense of agency and victimization. Lisa explained that her husband became abusive in their marriage

...my husband was very abusive.... I was young, I married him when I was sixteen and it was like a forced marriage, I got pregnant he was twenty and my mom said you either marry her or you goin[g] to jail for statutory rape. (Lisa)

Lisa's choices appeared to be limited and determined by those in authority over her. After marrying young, she became a victim of intimate partner violence. Davina reported experiencing multiple losses. She described the loss of her biological mother since she gave her up for adoption, the loss of her twin brother who was killed, the death of her adoptive mother, father and brother on her father's side; as well as her adoptive sister's loss of health.

At age 2 she adopted me so [she] had become my mom by law...
[A]t age two, she adopted me and my brother, but he got killed.
(Davina)

Davina explained each loss at various points throughout the interview and provides detail on the meaning of such significant loss. Davina contextualizes her empathy for her children as they experienced loss related to the separation caused by incarceration.

...[M]y brother – my older brother, he's really my brother, but he's my daddy's son too. He was staying with my auntie, *passed away* - diabetes, went into a diabetic coma. Everybody I was getting close to – just like my baby – I'm not mad at how she reacts to things. Everybody she gets close to leaves. (Davina)

Davina explained that the impact of her losses led her to have anxiety around leaving her home, as an adolescent and into adulthood. She feared that her leaving home would result in someone dying.

This is my father – this is who adopted me. ...He passed away and I was like ...12 years old and, I told myself I was not going back and forth. ... If I leave this household I might come back and somebody else gone. That's just how I was thinking – I had messed up thinking and it happened just like that and I seen it well before. I saw me leaving home and my mama died. (Davina)

Davina expressed a sense of loss related to her sister's diminished capacity. She explained that her sister was the backbone of the family. Davina relied on her sister's support

and her sister's impending loss of vision further complicates this subtheme for her.

She's got diabetes [and] she is going blind. She sees blurrily; she has cataracts... on both [of] her eyes – she's having surgery now to try to ... prolong her vision but they [are] saying it [is] temporary she'll go blind [eventually] because she caught her diabetes so late and it already had done a bunch of damage... (Davina)

Davina's sister's health-related loss was significant enough for her to discuss it in relation to other losses she experienced. Davina verbalized the significance of these losses consistently throughout the interview.

Incarceration brings about many relational changes for women. Although not all women in the sample discussed relational losses Eden talked about the loss of her marriage as a traumatic experience:

After I became imprisoned he decided he didn't want to be married anymore. So, it was a quick change for him. (Eden)

More specific to the subtheme of intimate partner violence as a traumatic experience, Eden reflected on how it affected her family:

They saw some violence. I just had a talk with my oldest [son]. He was the one that's seen the most...(Eden)

Although Eden does not describe this subtheme as intensely as others, she has experienced intimate partner violence.

Juana described loss in the sense of not being reared by her biological mother and the loss of her father.

[M]y childhood was kind of damaging and I always said that I would never take my kids through that. ... I wasn't raised by my biological parents. (Juana)

Juana further explained the issue she has with her mother not raising her:

My mom was sickly when I grew up. When she birthed me she couldn't walk and her family took care of me. The thing that got me was my mom raised four of my father's children by another lady and I couldn't understand why she raised 11 children and not me; and it was nothing that she could tell me that could make me understand that - you didn't raise me! (Juana)

Loss has a good level of intensity for Juana, as she spent quite a bit of time explaining her own difficulty understanding why she was not reared by her biological mother when she raised so many other children. In addition, she discussed her attempt to resolve these feelings, stating that you only have one mother. Juana also said, "I don't want to lose my mom and still be holding resentment."

The women participating in this study did not discuss any attempts to access services or seek counseling prior to incarceration. The women's narratives represented in this theme shows a common experience related to abuse and loss primarily. Despite this shared experience the women also present unique variations in their circumstances surrounding trauma and the ways in which they have coped with these life events. These narratives demonstrate multiple levels of context about their lives in addition to revealing their own vulnerabilities.

One such vulnerability was that the women had to make the decision about who would care for their child(ren) during their incarceration. The narratives of participants in this study are captured in the following section. Decision for caregiving is an a priori category/theme. The question on the semi-structured interview asked, how did you decide who would care for your child(ren) while you were incarcerated?

2. Caregiver trust

The second theme caregiver trust refers to the formerly incarcerated woman's explanation about how she decided who would care for her child(ren) during her incarceration. In my analysis of the data the theme "caregiver trust" yielded a relatively strong level of groundedness across all interviews (50 across all 12 of the interviews). Six of the twelve participants had grandparents as family caregivers (4 maternal and 2 paternal). Three of the twelve participants reported that the decision for which relative would care for their child was an automatic decision, it would be the child(ren)'s biological father. One participant identified her adult daughter as her child's caregiver and three of the twelve identified an aunt.

All of the participants responded to the question of how they decided who would care for their child during their incarceration. The majority (9 out of 12) indicated that they chose the best person available who they knew would take good care of their child(ren) and the choice was based on having a prior trusting relationship with this person. Many of the women and their children had a supportive relationship with the family caregiver making it an obvious choice for them, and three of the twelve women (one quarter) articulated their choice as one of natural selection – the child's biological father. All expressed having confidence or trust in the caregiver's ability to take good care of the child(ren).

Trina decided that her mother would be the one to care for her children. She expressed certainty in her decision similar to many of the other women in this sample:

...My mom, she always ...treats my kids, you know, the same way
I treat them so I knew she would be the best person to care for them.
(Trina)

One participant's choice was outside the typical responses of the other women. Juana expressed a high level of confidence in her daughter's ability to care for her son. In addition, she indicated that her daughter already spent a lot of time with him and that they had a strong bond:

I know my daughter is responsible – that's why I chose my daughter and I know she's going to make sure he is okay. She's going to take care of him the right way. (Juana)

An important element of these caregiver decisions was the desire to avoid the foster care system and ensure that children were placed with a kin caregiver. Two of the twelve women selected more than one family caregiver. For one participant (Davina) it was due to her mother's death that her sister had to step in to care for her children until her release:

I chose her because I knew my kids would never be harmed and they would always be put as if I was there. You know what I'm saying and even better because she's my mom. My sister ain't never turned her back on me and I knew that if something happened to my mom – she would step in. My mom put her down as my second beneficiary [guardian] – on everything. (Davina)

Davina's mother passed away before her release and her sister became her children's caregiver as planned. The transition for caregiving in this situation was uneventful.

For Cherri, the decision to change caregivers came after her discovery that the step-sister was not caring for her children properly:

I originally chose my step-sister to care for my children, but from what I was told she wasn't doing it properly. So, my mother got guardianship of them—temporary guardianship. (Cherri)

Choosing who would care for their child(ren) was one of the most important decisions the mothers in this study faced as they anticipated their pending imprisonment and being separated

from their families. Preparing for the thought of being separated from one's children is a daunting and unimaginable task for many mothers.

In one case of a cohabitating couple, the participant, Harris, described it as a natural selection. Harris stated,

It's not up to my mom or my grandmother or anybody else to raise our child so that was you know not anything up for discussion. He was going with his father. (Harris)

The women who decided to leave their child with the child's biological father were in well established relationships and expressed certainty about their decision and the father's role in caregiving for the child. Despite going through a divorce, after sentencing, Eden indicated that her daughter's father made the decision, "Dad decided – that's it!" It was as if the choice was automatic, no questions asked. Eden did not articulate it as a process of elimination, but rather one of natural selection.

Trina believed that the relative caregiver they chose would treat their child(ren) similar to the way they parented:

My mom she's always a she treats my kids... the same way I treat them. I knew she would be the best person to care for them.
(Trina)

The common theme for all respondents was that the person they chose would take good care of their child(ren). The women shared a belief in placing their children in nurturing environments where they would receive quality care. They all wanted their children to be with someone with whom they had become accustomed and had a good relationship already established.

The decision of who will care for your child(ren) during incarceration is associated with the incarcerated mother maintaining contact with her child(ren) during incarceration. Perhaps, equally important is the effect it may have on the mother's experience in transitioning back to parenting. The narratives related to parenting transition are captured in the next section and represents another a priori category/theme.

3. Parenting Transition

Parenting transition, the third theme, refers to the process of transitioning back into the parenting role after prison. It further describes how the formerly incarcerated mothers in this study attempt to resume their authoritative role and caretaking responsibilities for their child(ren). This theme was selected from participant statements related to various aspects of parenting and was found in a combined 153 direct quotations related to questions about parenting transition and one general question asking them to tell me about their children. This code was heavily grounded and representative across all participant interviews.

After further refinement of the code, I was able to identify five subthemes related to the larger theme parenting transition. The subthemes were well grounded and represented in all 12 interviews. Moreover, the subthemes were derived from the direct quotes of participants. Five subthemes emerged and were identified as: (a) positive connections to their children, (b) preparation for resuming parenting, (c) maintaining contact, (d) relationship as a conduit, and (e) responsibilities.

a. Positive connection to their children

The subtheme positive connection to their children was taken from

the direct quotes of the participants in response to the interview question, “tell me about your children” contained in the interview guide. This question is deliberately broad to allow participants to respond openly. It also served as a starting point for the interviews. There were 94 quotes associated with this deductive a priori subtheme across all 12 of the interviews. Quite common in this theme were the participants’ descriptions of their children as indicators of strong positive connections with their children.

Nine of the twelve participants described their children using positive adjectives, like smart, unique, beautiful, sweet, happy, energetic, and intelligent. Two of the twelve mothers indicated that they know what types of food they like. Many of the mothers talked about what their children enjoy doing like, karate, singing, playing with toys, going to church, and going to school.

Eden described her daughter’s attributes in a positive light and acknowledges what she knows about her despite being incarcerated when her daughter was only a toddler. Eden visits her daughter on weekends and although her ex-husband has custody she remains very involved: [She] is very opinionated ...she’s very smart and ... very unique.

She’s a baker, very ... smart about speaking to strangers and her interaction with people she does not know. (Eden)

Bianca talked about being a bonded family. She described their life together in positive ways until becoming overwhelmed by drug use:

I knew what foods they liked, what gave them allergies, what they don’t like...you know. That was mostly... that was in my addiction –I was trying to balance everything and it just got overwhelmed. (Bianca)

Lynette described her children with a great deal of detail. She appeared to be an involved

mother who distinctly appraised each of her children's personalities. Lynette talked about her children's characteristics and described their behavior as just that, behavior and not as inherent attributes of their identity:

My ten year old ... she's a beautiful child. Due to my drug usage...[she] has some behavior problems... She's on medications for ADHD [and] bipolar [disorder] [she]...just gets out of control sometimes. (Lynette)

Lynette continued to describe each of her children in relation to their own unique characteristics. Although, Lynette describes her daughter's mental health challenges she also describes her in a positive light:

My seven year she's also very bright. She is on the Honor Roll at school—she makes it every semester. She has been diagnosed with OCD; she plays with strings—almost to the point where she is obsessed with them. Regular strings that unravel out of your clothing; and she identifies them [as] a person. (Lynette)

Lynette speaks also of her youngest child, and summarizes her thoughts about all of her children at the end of this excerpt:

My 5 year old is beautiful as well. She is so articulate – she's bright; she's always asking questions: why this, why that? She always wants to know how everything works and you know how everything is designed. They are three beautiful children and I love them very much. (Lynette)

Before I left her home upon wrapping up our interview, Lynette received a telephone call from her daughter's physician. While she was on the phone she gave him a detailed account of her children. One has behavior problems, she stated, and the other had trouble sleeping. Lynette demonstrated active parent at the point of this visit. She is involved in their life and is able to articulate specific details about them individually. What was remarkable was her effortless description of the girls' diet that week, sleep patterns, behavioral descriptions and her execution

of her parental role and competency. Lynette had taken decisive action to seek help for her children's mental health issues and she described each of them in the most positive manner.

b. Preparation for resuming parenting

The subtheme preparation for resuming parenting is a part of the transition back parenting after prison. For the purpose of this study, to prepare means to anticipate, take a course of action for parenting and it implies that there is a process involved. This subtheme was representative of 12 of the 12 participants and yielded 50 quotations. Participants' responses were chosen based on their articulation of how they prepared to parent their children after their separation.

The following statements were extracted from the interviews and represent the commonality among Capri, Trina, Janice and Juana of taking parenting classes. Taking parenting classes may be useful in helping the mother anticipate the resumption of the parenting role. Capri talked about taking parenting classes and her philosophy about discipline when asked about how she prepared to resume parenting:

I took parenting classes and I never really had a problem with being a parent. ...I [have] never been a parent who had to beat my kids. I was able to talk to my kids. (Capri)

Trina also reported that taking a parenting class during her incarceration was helpful, She also reported that she continued parenting even though she was incarcerated. In addition, Trina stated that maintaining contact helped her prepare for parenting again:

What prepared me was you know, taking the taking the parenting classes and just the visits. Being able to be a mother from prison ... really helped a whole lot in my transition coming home and... getting back into the parenting role. (Trina)

On the other hand, Janice reported that taking classes helped her improve who she is as a person. For Janice, seizing every opportunity for self-growth and reflection helped prepare her for the resumption of parenting. Although she stated it succinctly, she described what she found helpful in preparing her to return to parenting: “I took every class that I could in there to better myself (Janice).” Janice seemed to suggest that preparing for the role of parenting meant she needed to also enhance who she was as a person. She used as many opportunities as she could to improve her personal knowledge base.

Juana talked about the need to take parenting classes in preparation to deal with any problems that should arise:

I guess basically just wanting to do the right thing. You know, I really think that I still need parenting classes because I missed out on a lot. I need to know how to deal with certain situations because even though I may not see it now [there] could be resentments. I would like to know different techniques on to deal with things that come up.... (Juana)

Juana further indicated that she is interested in taking more parenting classes and explained why:

I really would like to take parenting classes. Because [of what] my children went through...there's still a lot of...unanswered questions. I just want to be able to prepare myself...to deal with things [because] I missed a lot. (Juana)

Juana answered the question in anticipation of making up for lost time and in acknowledgment of her need to enhance her parenting skills and reservoir of disciplinary strategies. Juana also expressed concern about her children's need to process what they went through with their mother being incarcerated.

Trina highlighted the importance of parenting classes and maintaining contact as important components of the formerly incarcerated mother's transition back to parenting:

What prepared me was you know taking the parenting classes and just the visits. Being able to be a mother from prison so that really helped a whole lot in my transition coming home and you know getting back into the parenting role. (Trina)

Alexis also conveyed that taking parenting classes in addition to being ready to return home made a difference for her:

I was ready to come back and take on that duty and like I said the parenting classes that I took, they helped a little. (Alexis)

Although Alexis did not give a lot of credit to the parenting classes she still referenced them as helping to prepare her for the resumption of parenting. Alexis articulated her answer in more automatic terms stating that she was simply ready to return to parenting.

Davina and Cherri simply stated that there was no choice, they were ready to get back to parenting and viewed it as their responsibility:

[It] is just part of being a mom. [N]ow that I am 'un-incarcerated' I gotta ... take care of my responsibility – it's not somebody else's responsibility... It's something that I have to do – I have kids. Parenting is a part of life. ...[T]he only reason that stopped me from parenting is that I ended up incarcerated. (Davina)

Davina described her return to parenting in automatic terms too. It is part of being a mom; they are my responsibility.

Cherri talked about returning to parenting as something that she had to do that was automatic:

I don't know if anything prepared me like I said it's not you don't forget you know how to parent it's just like you just go back in and continue to do what it is you know how to do or what you've been doing. I had to get used to things that my mother had changed. (Cherri)

Juana discussed the transition back to parenting in different terms. Juana explained the process as a time of getting to know more about each child:

Just really...wanting to get to know my children as individuals [be]cause it's easy to deal with kids as a group. All of them [are] my children [but] they still have different personalities and I have to learn each one as an individual [be]cause they're not the same. (Juana)

Lynette acknowledged the transition back to parenting as a process as well and not something that is automatic:

My relationship with them [her children] is growing every day. We had to reestablish our bond...it gets stronger and stronger. I had to re-learn ...their ways, their likes and their dislikes; and [I] had to [reiterate] my parental teachings...get them back under my authority... (Lynette)

Lynette describes the process of reestablishing her parental authority, emphasizing the need for a readjustment period, a time of becoming reacquainted with her children and a time to remind them of her way of doing things (parenting).

Similarly, Davina talked about understanding the need to resume parenting as a process. Davina describes the difficulty in transitioning back to parenting and later articulates her understanding of the need to view it as a process:

I see how my daughter is; it's certain stuff that she won't even *hear* me on. She looks at me like I'm half assed crazy. Excuse my language – half crazy, and then she keep[s] on moving. I have to get my sister to get her to do something. It's certain things that make me look at the gap between me and my kids' relationship. (Davina)

In addition to reestablishing parental authority Davina acknowledged her children's adjustment:

I take what she feels into consideration...I know that since I've been gone out of her life so long I came back out and I knew I really couldn't jump right back into it like I hadn't left at all. I really [take] slow paces like - compromising...I ask my sister how were y'all doing before I got here. I'm not trying to change the criteria or the atmosphere that had been in I just came to just pretty much be their force. You know what I'm saying, I don't want to change the routine they've been doing for years [be]cause it's going to throw them completely off track. (Davina)

Davina's expression demonstrated a greater intensity in the theme. She also demonstrated a more sophisticated understanding of transitioning back to parenting as a process. Davina discussed the need to approach her parenting role by understanding her children's perceptions. In addition, Davina did not superficially impose her authority on her children by virtue of her parental status (i.e., based solely on biological determination). Rather, she expressed a willingness to allow her children time to get used to her authoritative role as parent. Davina stated, "I just come in ... with baby steps and ... pick up where my mom left off."

Similar to Davina, Trina expressed the process of transitioning back to parenting in lieu of her children's needs:

I know with my nine year old it's a little rough because he don't want me to go nowhere you know [be]cause he's afraid that I'm [going] to leave again. He calls me on the phone, "mama where you at, what time you comin[g] home?" I'm like child, just please stop callin[g] me, mama comin[g] home. It's been a rough journey; it bothers me that I missed five years...out [of] their lives...(Trina)

Another notable difference was the experience expressed by Alexis regarding the importance of maintaining familiar surroundings as she transitions back to parenting:

...Probably because the transition was so easy because they were just going back to a familiar place they were just they were at my parent's house, the house that I grew up... The same block, the same people, the same friends. Um just that comfortable that you know ... this is all familiar to me. I didn't ... have to get used to or... get acclimated to a new neighborhood or new friends or you know things like that. I think just comin[g] back seein[g] everything in the same place how you left it. It makes the transition a lot easier. (Alexis)

According to Alexis, living in her parents' home with her children before she was incarcerated made their transition smoother. Maintaining familiarity in her surroundings eased her transition.

...[S]ome people go to prison and they come home and the trials and tribulations of getting back to normal and finding somewhere to live or things like that. I think because I didn't have to experience that made it easier to... come back home [and] fall right back into place. (Alexis)

The transition back to parenting is a subtheme that highlights the formerly incarcerated women's articulation of how they prepared to step back into the role of parenting. Their responses were clustered in several areas such as taking parenting classes, an automatic occurrence, and a process and as something child-centered. Four of the mothers, Capri, Trina, Janice and Juana, took parenting classes and found them helpful. Davina and Cherri discussed their transition as automatic as if there was no choice. One unexpected result was that 5 of the 12 women saw the transition as a process. Juana, Lynette and Davina recognized transitioning back to parenting as a process reestablishing their parental authority. Trina and Alexis talked about transitioning as a process of learning their children's needs (e.g., for counseling, to be understood).

Maintaining contact during incarceration can help to facilitate a parent's transition back to parenting once they are released from prison. Trina specifically stated that maintaining contact with her children during incarceration also helped her transition back to parenting.

What prepared me was you know taking the parenting classes and just the visits. Being able to be a mother from prison so that really helped a whole lot in my transition coming home and... gettin[g] back into the parenting role. (Trina)

The transitioning back to parenting was a common theme with some nuanced differences between 2 of the 12 participants. There is a level of intensity in the theme for Alexis around familiar surroundings and comfort with transitioning back to parenting. Alexis lived in a stable community with her children prior to being imprisoned; returning to the home of her parents gave her comfort in resuming the parenting role. Juana differed in that she described getting to know her children as a nuanced component of transitioning back to parenting. For Juana, this was significant because during her separation from her children she was only able to connect via letters and had no face-to-face or telephone contact.

The next section illustrates how the women in this sample maintained contact with their children during their incarceration.

c. Maintaining contact

The subtheme maintaining contact was selected based on participant responses represented across all 12 interviews describing how they maintained contact with their children during their incarceration. Eleven of the twelve participants in this sample maintained contact with their children and did so in one form or a combination of the following: 10 by telephone, 8 by letters, 7 by face-to-face contact, and 1 reported participating in story book recordings and

video visits. The prison provided assistance to Eden in providing her with opportunities to reach out to her children by way of story book and with telephone calls.

Three participants communicated by telephone contact only and had no face-to-face visits during their entire period of incarceration:

I was allowed to call collect, they always accept[ed] my calls they never tried to separate me from my kids. (Davina)

Although Davina had a good relationship with her adoptive mother, the mother became terminally ill during Davina's incarceration and was not able to transport the children to the prison, which was quite a distance from the Chicagoland area. In addition to her mother's terminal illness her adoptive sister has uncontrolled diabetes and is losing her eyesight. Davina understood the situation and expressed an appreciation for her mother accepting her collect calls from prison.

Similarly, Lynette had no face-to-face contact with her children despite the child visitation program in the prison. She reported having a strained relationship with her child's family caregiver which hindered her ability to take advantage of the prison's visitation program:

[Visits] were arranged through the mom and me camp, but the aunt and mother-in-law didn't take part in it...I may have gotten a few free calls through the family and children services [within] the prison. (Lynette)

Lynette made attempts to write letters but in the end, had to rely on prison services for help calling and/or writing her children, consequently her contact was limited.

Bianca did not have visits with her son during her incarceration because her mother-in-law was older and was not connected to any programs which may have helped to provide

transportation. Instead, Bianca relied on the prison itself to allow her to make a collect call on occasion:

They had social services; in the penitentiary they give you a case manager. And they have social field services...[if] I'm not mistaken. But they'll let you make a phone call. I explained ... my situation to them – how old my mother-in-law was; she was keeping a child and that the baby was real small and was I able to make a phone call and my phone call was like 15 minutes. (Bianca)

Capri had phone contact; some visits and letters which she used to make sure her children were aware of her love for them and understood that she still had parental authority. In addition, Capri wrote letters or sent cards as a way to be involved in the developmental milestones in her children's' lives:

It didn't have to be a birthday or graduation. I wrote them constantly. I pressured wrote, I pressured parent[ed]... I pressed – even through the phone. I constantly told them how much I love them. Being able to be a mother from prison so that really helped a whole lot in my transition coming home and you know getting back into the parent-ing role. (Capri)

Other participants, who received visits from her children relied on community based social service programs to maintain contact:

They came once a month with Lutheran Services or sometimes they would come ride in with my cousin when she would come visit me. (Cherri)

Eden, who had some family visits, also discussed her involvement with programs that helped her maintain contact with her children. One social service program used technology to provide video contact and other media forms:

Video visits. I also had what they call Aunt Martha's Storybooks —that's where this particular organization would come out with

CD's ... [so] you could record reading books to your children...
And you would send that CD to them. And you would pick out
some books for them and cards and they would get together little...
packets [to]...send...to them and that way they could hear
mommy talking. (Eden)

The theme parenting transition was represented across all interviews and had individual levels of intensity. For at least 5 of the 12 interviews, the participants stated that taking parenting classes was particularly helpful. Of the five, one anticipated how helpful classes would be and expressed a desire to take classes. The other four participants took parenting and other self-help classes during and after their incarceration.

Three of the 12 women (nearly one-third of the sample) indicated that parenting is their responsibility alone and therefore, it is simply something that has to be done. This matter of fact attitude was not meant to be disheartening but rather it was stated as a pragmatic declaration.

During incarceration familial relationships are often strengthened when mothers are allowed to maintain some type of connection with their children. The obstacles to maintaining contact seemed to stem from caregiver ability and/or willingness. In some cases a strained relationship or a caregiver with health challenges encumbered the visitation process. Conversely, if there was a good relationship with the caregiver visits occurred. Caregivers who did not have the financial means but had a willingness to participate in prison visits used community based programs to facilitate the parent-child visitation. However, if the caregiver and mother had a strained relationship, as in the case of Lynette, the caregiver may not utilize community programs that help with transportation to the prison.

Relationships are important in reestablishing one's life outside the prison. Prior relationships may effect what happens during incarceration and may have a direct influence on the mothers' parenting transition post-incarceration.

d. Relationship as a conduit

The subtheme relationship as a conduit refers to the descriptions of the quality and type of relationship this study's participants have with their children (before and after incarceration). Pre and post relationships may serve as a conduit for the formerly incarcerated mother as she transitions back to parenting. The relationship between the formerly incarcerated mother and her child(ren) was described as good by all 12 participants and was taken from 71 of the direct quotes related to this subtheme.

Juana described her relationship with her children prior to being incarcerated as lacking engagement.

You know financially I did what I needed to do but physically I wasn't there. You know ... that was kind of hard on them [be]cause even with me being there and seeing me present ...it wasn't like the relationship they should have had with me [wasn't there] [be]cause I was high most of the time. (Juana)

She also stated that her daughter provided structure in the home:

[I]n my addiction my daughter was the one that always wake up and make sure that everything was okay. You know and it kind of put a strain on me and her relationship. In a way, I kind of made her grow up too fast. You know, at one point she felt like she raised the kids and it was like we would bicker about if I ...if she told them one thing and I told them another she felt like she was more the responsible one at the time. (Juana)

Juana's relationship with her daughter since her incarceration was described as providing her with a source of support and encouragement:

...She would give me advice and continue to tell me you know, ma keep pushing forward, and it made a difference to me – to know that somebody cared.... She showed me that...she was there. At the moment we have a beautiful relationship– it gets better and better as time goes on. She supports me. (Juana)

Capri described her relationship with her children in the following manner, illustrating the same sense of support and encouragement:

I can say my relationship was good – healthy, loving, nurturing... I get nothing but praises from my children. ...even before and now after. [And] in spite of my drug use I believe they knew but they loved their mom unconditionally because I was what you'd call an active drug user. (Capri)

Lynette on the other hand described her relationship in terms of protective parenting. Her relationship with her family caregiver provided protection for her children:

Prior to going to prison I was under the influence of drugs. Um and I would say I had my children with me like six months prior to me going to prison. I had given guardianship to the father's sister, their ...paternal aunt and...we great relationship it's just that...I wanted to protect them and not allow them to be around my usage and things that you know I endured while I was using. (Lynette)

Although the above quotes are not fully representative of all the participants it has intensity for those for whom relationship serves as a conduit to resuming the parenting relationship. Another subtheme reflects the manner in which mothers engage in the act of parenting as illustrated below.

e. **Responsibilities**

Participants described parenting in relation to the responsibilities, tasks and commitments involved in the parent role. The responses here are represented in 28 quotations across all 12 interviews.

The underlying commonality of this subtheme relates to their views on the parenting role. Some participants refer to the parental responsibility to nurture, develop, guide, and love their children. A few women agreed that educating their children is important. To one participant in particular, Harris, education was emphasized:

You're not just a parent, you're a teacher. You're developing this person to go out into society. (Harris)

Harris, the mother of a three year old son, acknowledged the importance of parental duty in helping children get a good start in life. She also expressed a wish for her son to focus on what is really important, "having the right frame of mind", ...and not focusing solely on "mainstream media" and other things that divert one's attention from [what is really important in life].

For Juana, the parenting role and responsibilities includes nurturing the child by being there for them. She stated, "I think a commitment to the parent role is to be there for a child. I mean financially is one thing but it's more than buying them things." Capri, on the other hand, focused on the importance of providing structure and discipline and being there for them. Capri's response to the parenting role and parental responsibility was:

To show how they [parents] care about them [children]...
When you discipline your child they know they [are] doing
wrong [but] it gives them a sense of knowing you care. (Capri)

Although Juana and Capri gave different responses the underlying meaning remains the same, to be an active parent who gives of herself and provides structure for them, disciplines them and demonstrates love and concern for their child(ren).

Davina described the parent role in the same terms:

The parent role to me means being a role model for my children, process of constant comparison allowed me to further refine being someone that they can depend on, respect, admire, look up to [and] confide in...[Being the one they can] go to for security, protection, and...just basically, knowing that I'm there for them you know.
(Davina)

Overall, many of the women verbalized that the parent role means being committed to and caring for the child as well as providing their basic needs. Several of the women were in coparenting relationships which may help to aid their overall transition to parenting.

4. Coparenting post release

Coparenting is the 4th theme in this study. Coparenting post release refers to sharing the responsibilities and duties of parenting children immediately following incarceration. A coparenting relationship reflects the interaction between the formerly incarcerated mother and her child's kin caregiver whether they live together or not. A coparenting relationship post release may enhance the resumption of parenting and in turn impact the mother's sense of maternal identity. Coparenting is an a priori theme and was represented in 8 of the 12 interviews with a good level of intensity for the participants whose narratives are represented in this code/theme. Although, coparenting post release theme has only 9 quotes, it still yields rich narrative about the processes involved in this transitional time period.

Some formerly incarcerated mothers ‘paroled out’ of prison to the homes of their child(ren)’s relative caregiver and simultaneously entered coparenting arrangements. Others returned home to a husband or fiancé and resumed the coparenting relationships they had prior to prison.

Harris talked about the nature of her coparenting relationship with her child’s biological father. She is currently engaged to him and the three of them live together. Her fiancé was also the child’s family caregiver during her carceral stint. Harris’ description of the coparenting relationship shows her perception of its value to her:

Aiden [her son’s pseudonym] will have his fits [and] his father will pull him to the side [and say to him], this is your mom—you just can’t say that you don’t love her... When it comes to discipline ...I feel like he’s looking at me like, who are you to discipline me? (Harris)

During the interview Harris reflected on coparenting and how the role it plays in helping her son adjust to her being home Harris stated that since she was separated from Aiden while she was incarcerated he no longer sees her as an authority figure in his life and she describes her fiancé’s role in coparenting, one of providing authoritative support.

Davina revealed a similar response related to coparenting post release with her older sister, who was also her children’s caregiver during her incarceration:

Sometimes my oldest daughter gives me a little hard time considering my sister’s been in the household the two years I was incarcerated. She seems to [be able] to get my daughter to do more than I can. (Davina)

Davina discussed coparenting as a natural occurrence since she was paroled to her sister’s home

after being released from prison. Davina also expressed feeling grateful for her sister's caregiving role and support. She further indicated that before she left for prison her daughter would listen but now she stated, "I have to get assistance from my sister" to get her to do something.

Capri is coparenting post release with her mother and her younger son's biological father. Her response revealed how the coparenting relationship is working for her:

Me and his father – we do teamwork with him. If it's something I don't feel right about with him or question it I go to his father and we come to some type of decision together. (Capri)

Capri stated that she and her son's biological father try not to bicker about parenting and that he is a father figure for her other children as well.

The coparenting post release theme among half the sample demonstrates that the participants coparent after their release based on their prior relationship, where they live after release and/or are paroled. The participants also expressed that coparenting is helpful to them as they reestablish their parental role with their child(ren) after release from prison.

The next section focuses on the expressions of the formerly incarcerated African American mothers in this study as they discussed various aspects related to maternal identity. Maternal identity may be influenced by one's perception of who they are in relation to the messages they receive from their closest relationships.

5. Maternal Identity

Maternal identity, the fifth theme, is defined as the participants'

view of ‘self’ as mother – or maternal image. Maternal identity was chosen from direct quotes from the participants in relation to responses regarding (a) their dreams of being a certain type of parent (29 quotes), (b) their desires and aspirations for self and children (39 quotes), (c) parenting esteem (29 quotes), (d) protective parenting (8 quotes) and (e) coping with being separated from children (7 quotes). Contained in all 12 of the interviews are subthemes representing the larger theme maternal identity. These subthemes derived from the direct quotes of participant narratives show high level intensity and salience with a combined groundedness of (112) one hundred twelve.

a. Dreams of being a parent

Included in the subtheme, “dreams of being what type of parent” there were 29 quotations across all interviews. Common among the mothers in this study is their descriptions of wanting to be better prepared to care for their children financially and simply being the best mother they could be. For a third of the participants (4 of 12), their dreams have of who they were as parents had shifted or changed in some way as illustrated in their narratives.

Cherri still dreams of doing more for her children. She talked about wanting a better environment for them and better schooling. According to Cherri, other than wanting to provide more opportunities for her children in a safer community, she believes she is the best parent she can be:

I dream of getting a big house for my kids and them being able to go outside and play and run around – where they don’t have to worry about things that may happen to them in the streets. ...Other than that, I really didn’t have any ...dream I guess of what type of parent I want to be. ...

I think I'm doing the best to me...and for them. (Cherri)

Davina discussed her dream and how it changed. Her desire to provide for her child remains the same but what she provides has been prioritized differently:

I wanted to provide everything for my kids... Before I went to prison, I was giving her everything she asked for—anything she laid her eyes on... I was getting it. But now that I see—buying all this name brand this or name brand that isn't necessary, I give her choices now and she go in the store and she wouldn't even pick up anything name brand and I looked at that. It's like I really wanted to be ...a miracle mom, pretty much...cause I mean you got to be a miracle mom to provide any and everything. (Davina)

Davina's dream of providing for her daughter has shifted to think more about meeting her needs than purchasing based on the image of name brand status. Instead, she realizes that her daughter is not concerned with name brand labels and that perhaps, her priorities have shifted.

Eden dreamed of providing for her children yet her priorities had also shifted.

Initially she dreamed of being a *rich parent* and indicated that, at times, she did not live within her means:

Rich ... parent – rich to the point where my children never had to worry about being homeless – because we were homeless before, several times...back in the day. ...Bad decisions ... mismanaging money, having a champagne taste on a beer budget as my mom would say. ...Richness to me now is not necessarily monetary – richness is having [the] opportunity to spend time with my kids. (Eden)

Eden 's priorities are now focused on a more realistic assessment of her financial means.

Although she still wants to provide for her children she wants to manage without spending excessively and placing them in a more vulnerable state, like homelessness.

Connecting to one's perception of their parental image, i.e., what type of parent did you

dream of being is one way to ascertain more information about how the participants view maternal identity. Another way is to discover how they connect to and understand their children. Describing their children was an important point of departure in the interview guide and it gave participants time to reflect on their children and become more relaxed before the interview progressed any further.

b. Desires, aspirations for self and children

This subtheme relates to the common code that arose from the narratives and is represented in 39 quotes across 9 interviews. Most commonly reported among this study's participants was that 9 out of 12 expressed a feeling of wanting something more for themselves and their children. This subtheme was selected from the (39) direct quotes from this study's participant interviews.

Harris, the mother of an only child, wants more for her three year old son. She does not want him to be gullible to street life and wants him to have strong refusal skills. Harris described herself as being naïve and unable to resist peer influence:

I didn't want my son to [be] expose[d] to any of the ills of the world. ...
I was sheltered a lot as a kid. I don't want him to be exactly like that
[because] that can make you gullible...[be]cause people can take
advantage of you. (Harris)

Harris had never been arrested before and believes that she allowed herself to get involved in someone else's affairs which led to her incarceration. The details were not discussed; however she did state that she should have put her child first and she should not have allowed herself to taken advantage of by others.

Some parents like Alexis pondered what their children need to be successful. She wants her children to accomplish more than she was able to educationally:

They will graduate from college in their twenties... have a successful life early on [and] be able to provide for themselves. ...live in a safe neighborhood. ...I think it is important for them to be well rounded people... (Alexis)

Alexis dropped out of school in the 11th grade and wants her daughters to accomplish more by completing college. She stated that she wants them to be educated, well rounded individuals who will be able to take care of themselves and be more independent.

[T]hey will graduate from college in their twenties. They will... have a successful life early on as far as what they provide for themselves.... I think they have a good childhood. They ... live in a safe neighborhood, they have bikes and skateboards and they are exposed to good programs....I just want 'em to go to college. (Alexis)

Bianca expressed a strong desire to change something for herself that would in turn benefit her children. She stated,

[O]ne thing I wanted to do as a parent is go back to get my high school diploma. ...Where I can feel like I accomplished something in my life... I want...[a] high school diploma so bad I can taste it. (Bianca)

Bianca wants to serve as a model for her children, demonstrating that despite her past incarceration she was still able to achieve one of her goals.

What one wishes, what one does and how one appraises themselves has a bearing on maternal identity. The next subtheme explores the narratives of the participants relative to how they feel about themselves as parents.

c. Parenting esteem

Parenting esteem is a subtheme related to maternal

identity. Parenting esteem is defined as participants' expressions of their esteem related to who they are as a parent; the self-evaluation of themselves as a parent. It was chosen from the direct quotes from the participants as they described their image of themselves. Parenting esteem arose as an inductive subtheme and is found across 8 of 12 interviews and is represented in 29 quotes.

Quotes from Capri, Davina, Trina and Alexis related to maternal identity illustrate a common subtheme of parenting esteem. Each of these women reported having a relatively good sense of self-esteem related to who they are as parents.

Capri seemed to articulate beliefs similar to the other participants as highlighted in the following quotes. The similar belief is that parents are not perfect and that making mistakes is common place. Capri stated that she saw herself as a great parent at one point:

I was a great parent – I just could have been a better parent at the time. I fell off; I made some mistakes. (Capri)

Davina expressed her parenting esteem in more direct terms.

Nonetheless, the common thread is that the women expressed feeling good about themselves.

I feel real good about myself (maturity)... I made some bad choices, but everybody do[es]. I'm okay with me. I have a very high self-esteem. I feel like what I wasn't able to do then I am ready to do now. I'm in the process of looking for a job – the whole nine [yards]. (Davina)

Davina voiced having a readiness level now that was not there before. In her reflection of who she is as parent she also assesses herself as a parent by stating that she has made bad choices but things are different now.

Trina differentiated who she is as a parent from her prison experience.

...As far as bein[g] a parent I don't see myself less of a parent you know because I've been incarcerated. (Trina)

Alexis discussed her parenting image as she sees it now and what potential she thinks there is in terms of her assessment of her own parenting.

I think like now I view myself as a good parent, but I think I definitely have the potential to be a great parent like to the point where you know when they get of age when they are adults they can look back like my mom really there for us you know. (Alexis)

Each of the women gave a self-assessment of their own parenting esteem. This subtheme was heavily represented across 8 interviews. In this section, 4 of the 8 participants' quotes are represented. The other 4 women's narratives are similar to those already presented.

d. Protective parenting

This subtheme refers to protective parenting (of which there were 8 quotes), relating to the measures taken by the mothers to protect their children from their substance abuse prior to incarceration. I view "protective parenting" as the mother's voluntary relinquishment of her child(ren), either formally or informally via temporary or permanent custody, in order to protect them during her active drug use. The women in this study describe taking this step as a way to provide her children with a safe and secure home environment.

An important parental role is the provision of safety and security for the child. However, if a mother has a substance abuse issue the child's safety may be compromised. Lynette describes her efforts to protect her children in the following excerpt:

I had given guardianship to the father's sister, their paternal aunt and ...we had a great relationship – it's just that I wanted *to protect them* and not allow them to be around my

usage and things that you know I endured while I was using.
(Lynette)

Capri used her support network to make sure her children were not exposed to her drug use. She allowed her relatives to be involved with them which in essence allowed her to shield them from her substance abuse:

At the time my kids ... were still small [young] so it was okay and then I was family oriented. Friends I had grown up with ... christened my daughters – so the kids were like always with somebody or doing something so I had a lot of help when they were small. They were always with aunts, godmothers, [and] cousins. So, never was my drug use in front of them. ...I wrote a letter giving my mom temporary guardianship cause we lived next door to each other. (Capri)

The women in this study describe the steps they took to provide her children with a safe and secure environment even if it meant relinquishing custody. Although, protective parenting does not have strong groundedness across all interviews, it does provide evidence of a particularly meaningful inductive and salient subtheme. The next subtheme relates to the women's emotional experiences coping with being separated from their children during incarceration.

e. Coping with the separation

Coping with being separated from one's children arose as a subtheme and was represented in two interviews and there were a total of 7 quotes. Capri and Alexis described their way of coping with the separation.

For Capri, she continually wrote or called her children in order to remain involved in their life:

I wrote them constantly; I pressure wrote and I pressure parent[ed].
I pressed, even through the phone. (Capri)

Alexis described being overwhelmed emotionally and having to emotionally detach during her incarceration in order to cope with the pain of separation:

...At first when I left I would cry every day and all I could think about was what they were doing and what I was missing. So taking away that emotional side and... involving myself [in] different activities there gave me the chance to...get away from that. I knew that in order for me to like get acclimated to the situation that I had to like emotionally I had to withdraw. I had to...stop crying and stop thinking about them so much.
(Alexis)

This subtheme is important as it represents the variations of the women's experiences related to maternal identity. Coping with being separated from one's children is salient as a subtheme for the two women whose narratives it represents.

The next theme focuses on the support the women reported having from their child's kin caregiver, from their own children and from the programs in which they participated. Support is important for many women reentering the community.

6. Support

The sixth and last theme, support is defined for the purpose of this study as, assistance given to the formerly incarcerated woman in any form, be it material goods, program support, emotional or relational support. Relational support is defined by Proulx, Helms, Milardo and Payne (2009) as the receipt of affirmation, opportunity for discussion, and material assistance in parenting or personal relationships.

Support was represented across all 12 interviews and was selected from 74 direct quotes across all interviews. Program support was reported across 5 of the 12 interviews. Relational support emerged in other narrative responses throughout the interviews.

Many of the participants discussed the role that programs played in helping them during either their incarceration or reentry phase. Eden reported that the prison she was in had programs to help mothers connect to their children:

They would help you get acclimated back into society and also to get reconnected with your children. (Eden)

Lynette talked about how programmatic support helped her when she was overwhelmed by one of the day-to-day tasks of caring for her children:

I got into different support groups and talked about it. How overwhelming it was you know the medicines that I have to administer to not only to one child, but three children. (Lynette)

Lynette also expressed her opinion about programmatic support:

I think that there should be more programs or inside and outside of the prisons to help you [re-acclimate] yourselves back into your children's lives. (Lynette)

Lisa reflected on the support she is receiving from a program that focuses on reentry services.

They give me a lot [of] good support. I have a great support system. Mr. H. is a great teacher so he give...a shot at hope for things. [H]e pointed out some things in me that I didn't see so. I mean this time I got a real good support system. (Lisa)

Lisa's experience with programmatic support seems relational as well albeit on a professional level. She talks about how meaningful the feedback has been that she has received.

Other women relied on the support they received from relatives and even on the support and encouragement they received from their children. These next few quotes represent relational support. Alexis, Davina, Bianca and Trina related to the support they received from their parents and in-laws.

Alexis provided the following description of the type of support she receives from her parents:

[T]he support was all around physical, emotionally, financially, spiritually even. I even spoke with ... the pastor of my mom's church sometime[s]. (Alexis)

Alexis and her two children live with her parents. Therefore, Alexis receives concrete assistance like housing, food and other material goods in addition to emotional/spiritual support.

Davina spoke with a good level of intensity about the level of support she received from her adoptive mother and sister throughout her interview.

They only ... took over my responsibility when I couldn't ...
[T]hey are really supportive. My mom when she was living
[she] [was]—very supportive. (Davina)

Davina's reported that the support she received from her mother was in the form of guidance. She stated that her mother would help her by stating, "You got your options" and then asking her "which one are you going to take?" This type of support was indirect and helped Davina in making her own choices.

Bianca talked about the support she received from her child's family caregiver that was in the form of encouragement.

Well she supported me of just saying – never give up. You can do it. If it get tough, I'll hold you up. (Bianca)

Trina indicated that her mother provided support in a couple of ways.

During my incarceration ...she brought the kids down... but ... the biggest support was taking care of my kids. (Trina)

Trina acknowledged her appreciation for the support she received from her mother. She also seemed to appraise the most significant contribution in her view, e.g., that her mother took care of her children.

Alexis, Davina Bianca and Trina discussed support but had varying types of relational support in the form of material goods like a place to live or in the form of emotional/spiritual encouragement. Also, shown in the above quotes is the support provided through guidance and encouragement.

A few women also related to encouragement and unconditional love from their children as support rather than from the kin caregiver. Capri, Trina and Janice highlighted what it means to them to receive encouragement from their children.

Capri talked about her children's support in the form of encouragement:

[T]hey have been my strength [be]cause when I was sad and distraught and worried – they'd be like – aun, aun Ma – stop Ma – wipe your face–[I think]...wow they give me strength. (Capri)

Capri stated, "I received [their] acceptance; I've been receiving unconditional love" [from them].

Trina talked about the love and support she received from her children as support and perhaps a buffer in her adjustment to reentry:

...[M]y children loved me right where I was. They welcomed me home with open arms, they ... [were] happy to see me. (Trina)

Similar to Trina, Janice reflected on her children's love as a form of support.

It was just like – they had no bad thoughts about me. They were little; they didn't know I was in prison, they still loved me. Even though they only saw me twice a week. I was grateful that they didn't resent me – they are little so they only know love. (Janice)

All of the participants in this sample gave voice to receiving support throughout their incarceration and reentry experiences. Although support is a common theme with great intensity and groundedness it demonstrates both similarities and differences of the types of support women received. Three of the twelve women talked about the role of programmatic support in helping them post release. Four of the twelve women discuss relational support they got from relatives. Three of the twelve women discussed the unconditional love and encouragement they received from their children as an aspect of relational support.

This study was focused on an exploration of the experiences of formerly incarcerated African American women as they reconnect to parenting. This researcher interviewed 12 formerly incarcerated women of African American descent who were receptive to sharing their stories. The twelve women represented a varied range of similarities and differences.

The first theme, history of abuse and loss, was not a surprising discovery as the literature discusses these experiences as possible pathways to incarceration. Half the women in this sample revealed having some history of abuse and loss. The women divulged their experiences during the interview process in a spontaneous and unsolicited manner. Their experiences were related to past sexual abuse and intimate partner violence both forms of gendered violence.

The second theme, caregiver trust describes the narratives of formerly incarcerated women about the experience of deciding who would care for their child(ren) during their time in prison. There appears to be a good variation of who the kin caregivers were (see Table 1) but a more common theme related to how they chose their child(ren)'s family caregiver. The breakdown of kin caregivers was 3 biological fathers, 4 maternal grandparents, 2 paternal grandparent(s), 1 maternal aunt, 1 paternal aunt, and one sister (reported in kinship relation to the child/children). The majority of women (9 of 12) reported choosing the kin caregiver based on their confidence that their children would be well cared for by that relative caregiver. They often stated that the caregiver was the best person available and would care for the children as if they were their own.

The third theme parenting transition describes the formerly incarcerated women's experiences reconnecting to parenting post release from prison. This theme was strongly grounded and had salience for all 12 interviews with 153 quotes. The five subthemes that emerged are (1) positive connections to their children, (2) preparation for resuming parenting, (3) maintaining contact, (4) relationship as a conduit, and (5) responsibilities. All 12 of the participants described their children in positive terms and most (9 of 12) reported having good relationships with their children prior to prison. Three of the 12 women found value in taking parenting classes in preparation for the resumption of parenting, one reported wanting to take a class and others expressed that their preparation was either automatic or a process. Three women described it in automatic terms (Davina, Capri and Alexis) and 5 of the 12 women described it in process related terms (Juana, Lynette, Davina, Trina and Alexis). The transition back to the role

of parenting does not take place in a vacuum but rather in the context of established relationships with children and kin caregivers.

The fourth theme coparenting was represented across 7 of the 12 interviews but yielded only 9 direct quotes. Nonetheless, this theme has a good level of intensity for those whose narratives it represents. This theme is representative of at least half the sample. Several of the women talked about either being paroled to the home of their child(ren)'s kin caregiver or to a partner with whom they still had a good relationship. Further, several of the participants talked about coparenting providing them with assistance in regaining their authoritative role with their children. Coparenting was often found to enhance the experiences of the mothers as they reestablish parenting relationships with their children post release.

The fifth theme maternal identity describes the formerly incarcerated women's expressions related to how they feel about themselves as parents. Maternal identity is represented across all 12 interviews with good depth. Five subthemes were captured within the larger theme of maternal identity yielding a combined 112 quotations. The subthemes are: (1) dreams of being what type of parent (29 quotes), aspirations for self and children (39 quotes), parenting esteem (29 quotes), protective parenting (8 quotes) and coping with being separated from their children (7 quotes). Two of the twelve women conveyed a shift in their dream of what parent they would become with what they believe is necessary. Davina talked about wanting to provide everything her children wanted but has since learned that spending time with them is needed more than high priced name brand products; and Eden talked about her shift in thinking about what it means to be a "rich" parent, her initial dream of being a parent. Many of the participants (9 of 12) talked

about their desires and aspirations for their children in common terms, i.e., wanting the best for them, wanting their children to have more opportunities than them and become well rounded citizens of this world. Parenting esteem was represented across 8 of 12 interviews. The women most commonly stated that they have a high level of self-esteem. The last two smaller subthemes within the larger theme of maternal identity are protective parenting (8 quotes) and coping with being separated from their children (7 quotes). At least two of the women talked about an unanticipated occurrence, their experience with making sure their children were protected during the time they were actively abusing drugs. They took special measures to relinquish parental rights and/or make sure their children were exposed to other family members who would care for them during bouts of drug use.

The sixth theme support was represented across all 12 interviews and yielded 74 participant quotations. Many women (5 out of 12) received help from programs and found support as program participants. One of the more salient shared experiences is the support the women received from relational support from relatives and/or their children. Support was described in terms of program services, guidance, encouragement and it was described in terms of unconditional love and acceptance from their children. Relational support seems to play a prominent and common role in the process of transitioning back to parenting.

These findings highlight the accounts of the women's experiences as they attempt to reestablish parenting responsibilities. Their narratives give voice to their experiences and shed light on the processes involved in reestablishing parenting.

V. DISCUSSION

“A story is a formula for extracting meaning from chaos, a handful of water we scoop up to recall an ocean.” – Wideman

A. Summary of Findings and Research Questions

This qualitative study was conducted from June 2013 until November 2013. In this study there are several findings related to African American women’s experiences as they attempt to reconnect to parenting postincarceration. The women who participated in this study varied in age, marital status and parenting experiences. Many of the formerly incarcerated women had past experiences of abuse (physical and sexual) for which they received no treatment. Several of the women in this sample experienced substance abuse prior to their involvement in the criminal legal system. All of the women attempted to reconnect with her children and all but one was successful in doing so.

In this section, I discuss the implications of this study related to the research questions that frame the interview guide. I will also discuss the implications for future research in the fields of social work, criminology and policy making.

B. Research Question 1—*What are the experiences of African American formerly incarcerated women as they resume parenting?*

The themes in the findings related to answering this question are *Parenting Transition*, *Coparenting*, and *History of Abuse* and Loss. The themes of parenting transition and coparenting are salient and demonstrate the processes involved in transitioning back to parenting. These themes have implications for gender specific practice especially as it pertains to maintaining the

mother-child and kin caregiver relationships. Coparenting is beneficial where positive relationships have occurred.

1. Parenting transition

Parenting transition, in this study, refers to the formerly incarcerated mothers' attempts to resume their parenting. The women discussed their attempts to resume an authoritative role with their child(ren) and take on or resume caretaking responsibilities as a custodial parent. The participants in this study largely reported having positive connections to their children before and after incarceration. Mostly, the mothers reflected on who their children were in a positive manner demonstrating a level of cathartic connection. The participants talked about their children with ample detail often glowing in their recitations about their children. They were excited to talk about their children and appeared equally candid at times about behavior problems, feelings of regret for having been separated from their children or for using drugs, and demonstrated insight about their children's unique qualities. The mothers discussed their children's school progress, their preferences, food allergies, as well as their idiosyncrasies. The participants in this study were involved and invested in reconnecting with their children.

The preparation for resuming parenting subtheme captured the activities reported by all 12 participants. The women talked about how taking parenting classes or self-help trainings helped them anticipate the return to parenting as well as their view of parenting as a 'pragmatic obligation' to provide support to their children which is supported in the literature (Moe & Ferraro, 2006). The women reported their need to provide for their children and also talked about this pragmatic obligation as something that is automatic. One participant stated that they are her

children and this means she should care for them – implying that it is something that is automatic and obligatory.

Throughout the interviews the participants discussed what it means to take care of or provide for their child(ren). Common among the women was an articulation of their obligation to provide for the basic needs their child(ren). While this finding is not new, it adds to Moe and Ferraro's findings of motherhood as a pragmatic obligation as an automatic parental obligation. Although the participants in this sample had the support of extended family in caring for their children they accepted their parental obligation and viewed the resumption of parenting as an automatic necessity.

Another aspect of the preparation for the resumption of parenting was articulated intensely through the narratives of several women. Many of the women in this study found that taking parenting classes during and post-incarceration was instructive and helped to prepare them for reestablishing relationships, managing challenging parental duties, and anticipating how to deal with the fallout of being absent from their children's life. The effectiveness of parenting classes within correctional facilities has been cited in the literature (Snyder, Carlo, & Coats Mullins, 2001); however fewer studies have focused on parenting class effectiveness post release. Among this sample of African American women, a pattern of commenting on and describing the benefits gained from taking parenting training/classes post release was established. A couple of the women talked specifically about how taking the classes helped them prepare to parent again and anticipate their child(ren)'s needs. Juana stated that parenting classes helped her understand that her children may have unresolved feelings of resentment. As a

consequence of taking classes Juana felt she was better prepared to anticipate how to deal with potential issues with her children.

Several of the women spoke with a good level of intensity about the transition back to parenting as a process. This finding was unanticipated. It may be linked to the taking of parenting classes, although this study did not attempt to make that distinction. As a process, the transition points I found to be most salient, I will refer to as the four “re” period: (1) re-acquaintance period where the mother has to learn more about the unique qualities of each child, (2) re-adjustment period where the mother has to learn how her children have been parented in her absence and the rules around discipline, (3) re-authorizing period where the mother has to reestablish her parental authority and (4) re-establishing period where the mother must reestablish a loving bond and relational trust with her child(ren). These periods enhance a mother’s ability to reconnect with her children. Although it was not articulated by all participants one mother stated specifically that maintaining contact during incarceration helped her in the resumption of the parenting role. Many of the participants may have benefitted from visitation although they did not state it directly. Maintaining contact helps to enhance the relationship as noted in the literature (Bloom, 1995; Flynn, 2014; Hairston, 2009; Turek & Loper, 2006) thus serving as a bridge in the process of transitioning back to parenting post release.

The relationship itself may serve as a conduit for transitioning back to parenting post-incarceration. Although all women reported having good relationships with their child(ren) prior to being incarcerated, a couple also acknowledged their absence due to substance abuse issues. Perhaps, more notable is that among those who felt that they were not present due to substance

use, the women took measures to protect their children from their drug use. I refer to this as ‘protective parenting’ – voluntary steps taken to insulate their children from the vicissitudes of their drug use/abuse. These women took measures to voluntarily sign over temporary guardianship to a kin caregiver for their children to protect their children. One participant talked about the role of family and close friends in spending time with her children when she was deep in her drug use. Family and friends acted as a protective buffer during her drug use. They assumed parental responsibilities, taking her children to church, having them baptized, etc. Protective parenting helped when mothers were unable to fulfill their parental duties. A review of the literature appears to be void of studies examining the concept I introduce as protective parenting. Gleeson, Strozier, and Littlewood (2011), examined the literature on multigenerational households and the motivation for kin caregiving and coparenting arrangements. Nonetheless, there are very little (if any) studies focusing on the actions taken by drug abusing parents to protect their children during their period of active use.

Another aspect of transitioning to parenting is the acknowledgement of parental responsibilities. After examining the narratives and comparing them to the research questions, I formulated what I interpret as influences to parenting transition (see Figure 2). As I interpret the findings I believe a tiered pattern exists that influences the formerly incarcerated African American woman’s transition back to parenting. First, relational positions provide a context for caregiving. Preexisting relationships provide a context for the formerly incarcerated mother’s decision about who would be responsible for the care of her child(ren) during her incarceration. In my examination of the narratives I surmised that prior positive relationships with kin may be

associated with the mother's choice of a kin caregiver, which further influences the maintenance of contact during incarceration. These positive interactions help to facilitate the transition to parenting post release (see Figure 2).

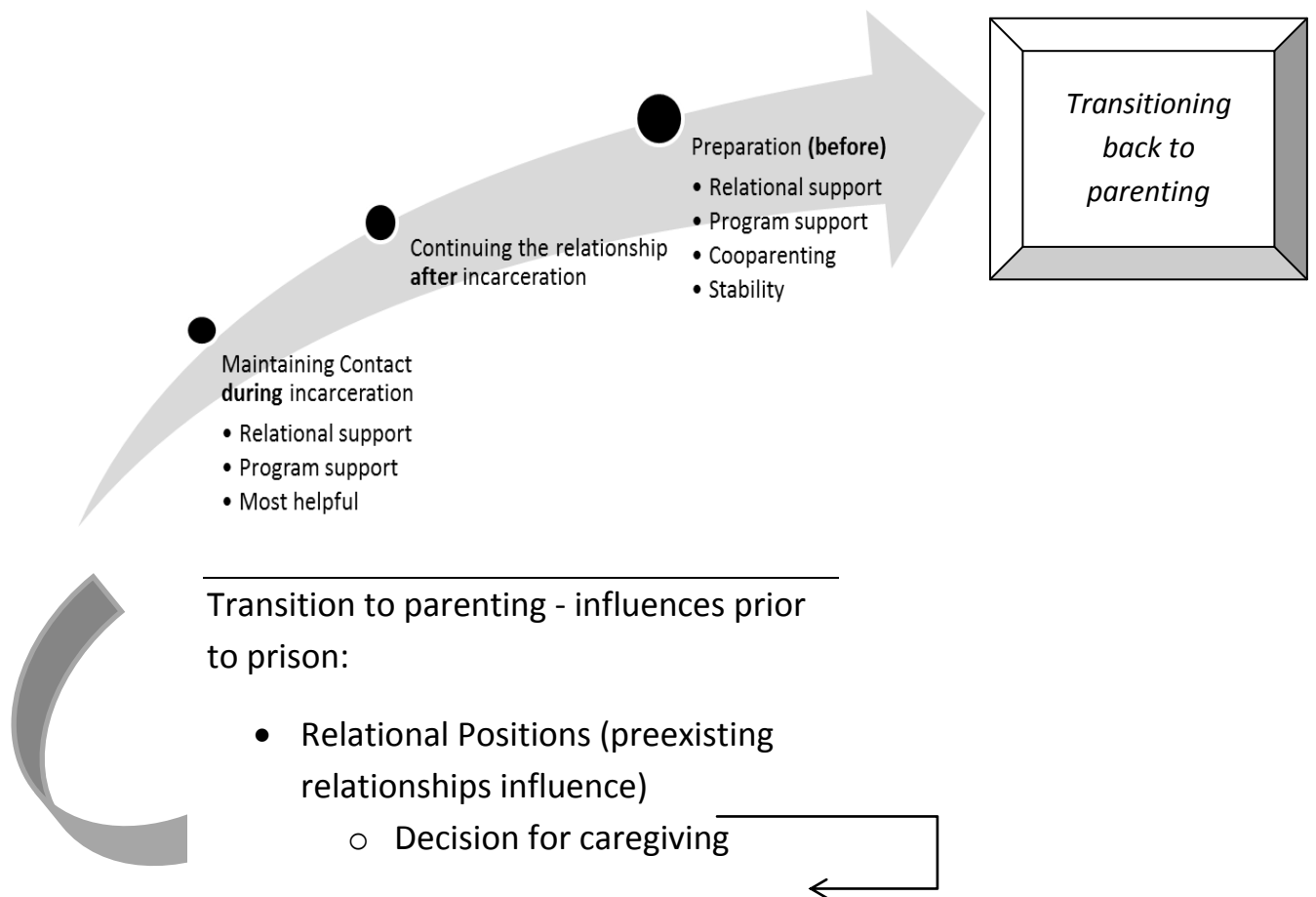


Figure 2. TRANSITION TO PARENTING INFLUENCES

2. Coparenting post release

Coparenting is a phenomenon that has been explored to some degree, but more focus is needed on the *processes involved* in coparenting post release from prison, as coparenting may influence the resumption of parenting for formerly incarcerated woman. Gleeson, Strozier, and Littlewood (2011) and others point to the rise in kin caregiving being directly related to the increase in incarceration (O'Brien, 2001; Smith, Krisman, Strozier, & Marley, 2004). Gleeson and colleagues (2011) articulate the importance of coparenting as a pre and post release phenomenon. Baker, McHale, Strozier and Cecil (2010) indicate in their examination of coparenting relationships between mothers and grandmothers that a further examination of the processes involved in coparenting is needed. My study supports the need for further exploration as the women in this study described coparenting in functional and supportive terms which may also serve to bolster the resumption of parenting. The women in this sample used the coparenting support post release to help ease them into their parenting role. The coparenting relationship appears to serve as a buffer often between mother and child during their transition period. The women articulated a keen awareness of the functional utility of coparenting. These findings illustrate how coparenting (*post release*) helped to: (1) bridge the gap between them and their children, (2) reinforce their parental position and authority to the child, and (3) provide them with overall parental support. Although many researchers have focused on coparenting in relation to grandparents, other relatives provide care for children when mothers are imprisoned. In this study the participants were coparenting with their child(ren)'s father, auntie, and sister in addition to grandmothers. Coparenting provides needed support to the

returning parent and allows the mother and child an adjustment period within a relational space. Further research may be helpful to examine the processes involved and how formerly incarcerated women coparent with other relative caregivers.

3. History of Abuse and Loss

The Black feminist scholar has the responsibility of conducting research for Black women as opposed to conducting it about Black women. It is therefore necessary to embrace an activist perspective toward research. In order to conduct research from an activist stance Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett (2003) make three suggestions for Black feminist scholars, and these suggestions are sequenced in three phases. First, the researcher must validate the individual's experience as an authoritative standpoint in accordance with the seminal work of hooks (1984). The researcher accepts that participants are experts in their own experiences. Second they draw on the work of Collins (1991) suggesting that the researcher move beyond knowing to understanding, which produces a level of consciousness about factors influencing participants' experiences. I believe this type of understanding refers to the researcher developing a deeper appreciation for the multiple contexts of people's lives. Third, Black feminist scholars emphasize empowerment within the context of Black women's lives. In this third phase it is critical to understand and acknowledge the use of personal, interpersonal and political power in effecting personal change.

As a researcher, I recognize the importance of validating participants' personal experiences as authority. The emergence of unscripted codes acknowledges my position on accepting participants as experts in their narratives. For instance, I trusted the importance of the

theme related to history of abuse and loss, as it appeared to be salient within the narratives. Many women repeatedly talked about their past traumatic experiences in relation to their pathways to prison. By focusing on my own values and possible biases through a process of reflexivity I was able to engage participants in a respectful manner enabling them to expand on the questions posed in the semistructured interview guide and provide in depth responses.

My study supports literature regarding women and trauma. Trauma is a precursor to substance abuse for women (Sonne, Back, Zuniga, Randall, & Brady, 2003). The exposure to trauma, physical and sexual abuse, closely resembles the literature on incarcerated women (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1992; Richie, 1996; Snell, 1994). Henriques and Manatu-Rupert (2001), found that women strive for mainstream roles including romantic relationships and that poor women are often involved in unhealthy intimate partnerships. Half of the women in my sample also experienced unhealthy intimate partnerships which were abusive and detrimental. In fact, abusive relationships led a couple of the women's to drug use and their subsequent incarceration.

C. **Research Question 2**—*What do African American women believe is necessary for successful resumption of parenting after release from prison?*

The findings specific to the theme of *Support* address and partially answer this question. The main premise related to support in the conceptual framework is that formerly incarcerated women may be influenced by the support they receive and maintaining contact with their children during incarceration as a bridge to enhance their post release experiences as they resume the role of parenting.

1. Support

Support has been a mainstay of African American culture and has helped to preserve the family in times of crisis (Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996). Moreover, research demonstrates that social support has a protective function as it buffers life's stressors. As I began this research I questioned the role of familial or relational support in aiding the formerly incarcerated mother as she reconnects to her parenting role. The findings in this study are similar to previous research which shows the importance of support in the life of the formerly incarcerated mother. The support discussed in the findings of this study point to material support, relational and programmatic support which was in some ways relational as well. Programmatic and relational support was cited by study participants as instrumental in reestablishing relationships with their children. Several women talked about how important programs were in the prison in helping them maintain contact with their children. Some programs continued to provide valuable services to them post release. The services most often referenced focused on reentry stabilization and securing stable housing and employment. In addition, acclimating to one's environment was salient to their experiences of transitioning back to the community and back into the parenting role.

One unanticipated finding was the intensity of the theme of encouragement from children for nearly a third of this study's sample. Encouragement from children was a salient theme and important to the mothers' discussion about transitioning back to the parent role. The discourse in the narratives was related to the encouragement and unconditional love they

received from their children which helped them resume parenting with diminished feelings of guilt and shame.

2. Maintaining contact as a bridge for resuming parenting

Among this study's sample the participants acknowledged the importance of maintaining contact with their children as a factor in resuming the parenting role. Various descriptions emerged as the women talked about their level of contact with their children. Some of the women had face-to-face visits either as a direct result of a social service agency serving children and families of incarcerated mothers or from their families' own efforts to maintain contact between mother and child. Others were able to maintain contact via telephone or letters. One mother had no contact at all and one mother reported the use of technology as a means of maintaining contact. The technology used was the direct benefit from a social service program where mothers were able to record storybook readings for their children which were later sent to them as well as the opportunity to participate in video chats.

The mothers in this study used their contact for a variety of reasons: (1) to consistently reinforce their declaration of love and concern for their children, (2) to make sure they maintained involvement in their children's lives, and (3) to continue their parental tasks or assert their parental authority despite being separated from their children. In addition, maintaining contact was a natural extension of their maternal identity and parenting role while they were separated from their children. Overall the mothers expressed that by maintaining contact with their children during their incarceration, they were more prepared to resume the parenting role post release.

D. Research Question 3—*How does relational support and interactions with their child's family caregiver influence the former inmate's maternal identity?*

The themes that emerged which addressed this question were *maternal identity* and *parenting esteem and coping with the separation*. Maternal identity has been defined in the literature in multifarious ways. Earlier work on maternal identity was examined as a process of becoming mother or by the tasks and roles associated with motherhood. For the purpose of this study I examined maternal identity by inquiring about the formerly incarcerated mother's view of herself as mother, dreams of what type of mother/parent she would be, and by having her delineate the roles and responsibilities of motherhood (see Tables II, III).

TABLE II

Relationship between formerly incarcerated mother and child(ren)

Participant	Prior to Prison	After Release
Davina	Good	Readjusting but okay
Bianca	Good	Okay – she will push you
Capri	Good	Good
Lynette	Close	Good
Eden	Good	Good
Alexis	Good	Good now but strained at first
Gina	Good	Good – same
Cherri	Good	Good – same
Janice	Good	Good – same
Harris	Attached – with infant	Good – developing again, “weird at first” readjusting
Lisa	Good	Good
Juana	Good – but admits to being high most of the time	Good

TABLE III

Relationship between formerly incarcerated mother and child's kin caregiver

Participant	Prior to Prison	After Release
Davina	Strong – support, love, friend, “great relationship” (mother & sister)	Strong
Bianca	Strong – tight bond (paternal grandmother)	Same—strong bond
Capri	Strained – called IDCFS on me (mother)	Improved— “loving her from a distance”
Lynette	Fair – didn’t always agree but it was civil (paternal aunt & mother-in-law)	Good— released where my children were at my mother-in-law’s home
Eden	Married – it was okay (then, husband)	Divorced— strained but accommodating with visitations (now ex-husband)
Alexis	Good – always a solid relationship with my parents. More of a daddy’s girl. (Parents – mother & father)	Some strain with mother (do not always see eye to eye about how to do things). Father very supportive and non-judgmental.
Gina	Good relationship (mother)	Good—“she was willing to step in”
Cherri	Not good / described her as evil (mother)	Strained
Janice	Fair and often strained (ex-husband)	Fair (good provider for the child)
Harris	Good (fiancé & child’s biological father)	Good
Lisa	Good relationship at first then became estranged (paternal aunt)	Broken—estranged now
Juana	Good relationship (daughter) –strained at times because the daughter became a parentified child (“ she always stepped in to make sure things ran” well / “I was always high”)	Good (daughter helps to facilitate visits with her youngest child/son)

The findings from my research reveal that maternal identity is dynamic and fluid, multifaceted and self-determined. The majority of the formerly incarcerated mothers revealed a high level of parenting esteem. Parenting esteem emerged as a salient theme. Without a question prompt, the participants offered spontaneous appraisals of who they are as parents despite their stint in prison. Although a few of the participants expressed having some regrets they had a high level of self-esteem as parents. Many described who they were as parents prior to using drugs, prior to being victimized by their partner and prior to entering the criminal legal system. At least one third of the sample recalled better times in their parenting life where they spent time with their children and felt they had provided well for their child(ren). A few struggled with their past but were aware of potential problems they may have with their children as a consequence and even anticipated what steps they may need to take to overcome them. Being able to anticipate what is needed to repair the relationship or to explain “why mommy went to jail” (as one participant stated) is similar to what Brown and Bloom (2009) noted. According to Brown and Bloom, formerly incarcerated mothers negotiate reentry as well as their relationships with their children post release. Despite retaining their sense of maternal identity, formerly incarcerated mothers were still concerned about mending their parental relationship with their child(ren).

I originally questioned how formerly incarcerated mothers would re-form their maternal identities. I posed this question without fully realizing the underlying assumption, which is that maternal identity somehow becomes arrested during incarceration and must therefore be re-formed. What I learned from the narratives of this sample is that their maternal identity is quite fluid. There was no indication of a reestablishing of maternal identity. Only one participant

revealed that she had to suppress her maternal focus as a way to cope with the pain of separation. She articulated that once she was able to detach from her parental focus or identity, she was then able to stop crying, which she had been unable to do prior. This mother described her ability to cope with being away from her children by suspending her maternal identity which was temporary and dynamic in nature. Nonetheless, she did not have to re-form her maternal identity once she was home. Maternal identity was more fluid and dynamic than I originally imagined for this sample of formerly incarcerated mothers.

These findings veer from the literature in that the formerly incarcerated women in this study expressed positive self-appraisals related to their sense of maternal identity. Their discussions of appraisals of others appeared to be less salient. Although the participants in this study articulated how others perceive them as parents it did not reflect as heavily in their self-appraisals of their parenting role. Perhaps, their level of parenting esteem influences their experiences in the resumption of the parent role. Further studies are needed to examine maternal identity, parenting esteem and the return to parenting post-incarceration. Further exploration could potentially advance the domain of research regarding maternal identity.

The conceptual framework I presented at the beginning of this study suggested that maternal identity might be influenced by relational support. In the next section, I will provide a discussion relative to the original conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 (Figure 1).

E. Conceptual Framework and Literature Discussion

In my conceptual framework I asserted that maternal identity and the return to parenting for the formerly incarcerated mother is influenced by interactional processes embedded within the

relational space between the mother and her child's kin caregiver. While this is true, the appraisals of others, an interactional process, was found to be less pronounced than the formerly incarcerated mother's own self-appraisal. The African American mothers in this sample expressed a strong sense of parenting esteem, a salient part of their expressed sense of maternal identity despite ever being incarcerated.

A second aspect of the conceptual framework is the Black Feminist Epistemology. It is important to me as an emerging scholar to realize my role in the academy (a Black Feminist Epistemological tenet) to giving voice, as an African American researcher, to the experiences of other African American women. The Black Feminist Epistemology helped in framing my study, developing the interview guide, and in detecting its presence throughout the study, and it will add to the literature on what is known about African American women and their incarceration experiences. This lens helps to situate the Black women's lived experiences and their cultural realities at the center of research. I sought to accept the contextual truths of these women's experiences throughout the research process without a dominant agenda. The Black Feminist Epistemological approach was present in the design of the research study, its protocol and research questions, and it paved the way for a respectful partnership with the formerly incarcerated African American women represented in this sample. The participants were comfortable with my role as researcher. I was comfortable with them as well, able to suspend judgment and live in the moment during my engagement in the field. I must admit, I have always felt honored whenever clients and now research participants allow me to listen to their stories; it ushers me into a space of shared meaning in the participants' life.

The Black Feminist Epistemology was useful in detecting how it pertained to the women in my study. One participant described her struggle to reach out for professional help citing the African American culture as a barrier to her accessing the counseling she needed. She indicated that many African Americans who need help do not reach out because it is not something you do in the African American community; instead you just struggle through your problems. Two other women talked about wanting more for their children than their communities could possibly provide. Many of the participants described feelings of marginalization from their community lack of resources and did not want their sons to model after young men who hung out on the street corner. These mothers described feelings of marginalization and did not want their child(ren) to imitate other young men who “hung-out” on street corners. They wanted more for their child(ren); they wanted them to be “well-rounded” individuals as one mother stated.

Moreover, the formerly incarcerated African American women in this study lack adequate financial resources, lacked employment opportunities and experienced less educational advancement than non-incarcerated peers. The Black Feminist Epistemology beckons the researcher to realize the systemic forms of oppression African American women experience prior to being incarcerated. The participants in my study helped to verify what has been documented in the literature related to African American women and incarceration. The mothers in my study experienced the scarcity of resources, societal and cultural barriers and they had histories of past abuse.

My conceptual framework was useful in guiding the parameters of my study. For future research it would be useful to have a more narrow focus on maternal identity and the processes

of reconnecting to parenting. In addition, learning more about the nature of the coparenting relationship as an influence on the transition back to parenting would require a different type of sampling to ensure having more coparenting relationships represented.

The literature related to African American women and incarceration was useful in understanding the population of women I planned to study. It helped me contextualize their experiences by understanding that the majority of incarcerated African American women are mothers of minor age children which has implications for how the study was conducted, what questions were asked and I was able to see where my findings matched the literature. My findings related to AA women's experiences are consistent with the literature related to AA women and incarceration and histories of abuse. In 1996, Richie found a link between African American women's histories of past abuse and criminal legal involvement. In addition, Henriques & Manatu-Rupert (2001) found that relational strain further complicates the life of formerly incarcerated women. This literature is informative in that it may also be true in the converse. The participants in my study maintained stable relationships with their child(ren)'s kin caregiver before, during and after their incarceration. These relationships provided further support to them as they transitioned back into the parenting role.

The literature related to personal and social identity and stigma was useful as a guiding lens for what I might expect to see. However, in my study the women did not report having a lot of stigma related to their maternal identity. Perhaps, a similar study of the same population would show different results about stigma beyond the three year mark I used. The mothers in my sample were well connected and did not express a sense of stigma. The participants in my

sample reported a strong sense of maternal identity post release. The mothers ability to nurture their child(ren) may have been affected by other factors like maternal age, mental health, social support, and/or coparenting relationships.

This study is consistent with studies that examine the role of relational support and prior relationship between the incarcerated mother and potential kin caregiver (Enos, 2001). In this study, mothers' ability to maintain contact, how they made decisions about who would care for their child(ren) was predicated on this prior relationship which bolstered the relational support they received. Positive relationships with the kin caregiver for their child(ren) was preexisting, enhanced visitation with their child(ren) and post release support. The maintenance of a positive relationship may have an effect on the ability of the kin caregiver and formerly incarcerated mother to coparent post release. According to Van Egren and Hawkins (2004) there are four dimensions of coparenting. Two of the four dimensions apply to this study are coparenting solidarity and shared parenting. Coparenting solidarity enhances coparenting as does shared parenting.

The literature related to early conceptualizations of religious convictions (Ross, 1998), was not as strongly represented in this sample. Two participants talked about God but in a very minimal way and did not intensify the discussion. According to Ross, women's focus on God took away from their ability to recognize their own oppression. In my sample the women did not focus heavily on God to deflect away from their oppression as Ross found. Perhaps, had my questions been more focused on how they coped with prison, I would have had similar findings to Ross.

F. Strengths and Limitations

The strengths and limitations in this study are discussed in this section. It is important to take a sober account of what went well and what may be improved. The strengths of this study include: 1) being able to engage the participants by being respectful of their expert status in this research process, 2) being culturally curious about their post-incarceration experiences, 3) being consistent in all efforts related to engaging research participants. Moreover, the use of one's personality, social work skills of engagement and inquiry, and my enthusiasm for the research questions was conveyed well. The data collection process was smooth as I was able to develop a relationship with the recruiting agencies.

Additionally, this study used qualitative methods that allowed the voices of African American women to be heard. This study revealed positive aspects of the participants' experiences such as protective parenting, positive coparenting relationships, their awareness of transitioning back to parenting as a process, and the role of relational support.

Because the experiences of formerly incarcerated African American women and their reconnection to parenting have not been greatly studied, this study adds to the literature in this area. Nevertheless, no matter how well some things go, all studies have limitations.

One limitation was not being able to recruit more participants for the member—check focus group. Having more participants would have added to the truth value and overall transferability of the study. Despite this limitation the focus group was productive and helpful in checking my interpretations.

Despite the noted limitations, the strengths of this qualitative research study outweigh

limitations. The trustworthiness of this study is a strength along with using African American women's firsthand account of their own experiences helps to add to the social science/social work literature. I addressed trustworthiness by conducting a member check and by demonstrating transparency regarding the methods used (Hennick, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). I conducted the member check in a focus group. In the focus group I checked my interpretations of the narratives with the participants. Based on their responses I was able to determine that I understood what they voiced collectively and that my chosen labels for codes were appropriate. In addition, explaining the methodology that I used helps to create transparency in the research process (Hennick, Hutter, & Bailey).

Another way of building trustworthiness is through the possible transfer of the study's findings to other contexts. Transferability refers to the ability of the research to be shared and applied beyond the study's setting (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). My study provides a thick description of the research questions, sampling strategy, and methods used. I describe the setting and context in which the study is situated, I give descriptions of the recruitment, selection and introduction of the participants as well as the data collection procedures, code development and analysis. It is plausible that a researcher may extend the findings of this study by including other perspectives such as the caregiver or child. Another extension may be to conduct similar research over multiple points in time or applying it to longitudinal inquiry. The findings in this study may be applied to other contexts such as practice settings in working with formerly incarcerated women.

Last, learning to use qualitative methods was a challenge for me as a new researcher. Nevertheless, I was honored to collect and analyze the participants' stories. Because of the subjective nature of qualitative research, it would have been helpful to conduct inter-rater reliability to enhance the credibility of the data analysis.

G. Social Work Practice and Policy Implications

This study has several implications for social work practice and policies governing how formerly incarcerated mothers are provided services. First, there is an enduring need to strengthen and empower families within African American communities. Because of mass incarceration, social workers and criminologists need to develop creative ways to provide comprehensive gender relevant services to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated mothers. African American mothers, as shown in this study, need programs to help them deal effectively with unresolved issues of past abuse, prior substance use/abuse issues and to help support mother's reconnection with their children.

Maintaining contact with children while incarcerated helps parents retain a sense of parental authority. Existing programs that help to maintain connections between mothers and children during incarceration provide invaluable services and the findings from this study support the need for expanding these types of programs.

Social work's mission is to fight for vulnerable and oppressed groups. Therefore, the profession of social work must fight for anti-oppressive policies and practices especially as it pertains to disenfranchised groups. African American women who have been abused need to be actively identified and provided services in a timely manner for greater efficacy. Cobbina (2010)

suggests that reentry programs for incarcerated women/mothers include educational services, treatment referrals and childcare.

Richie (2001) writes that women of color leaving prison do not feel embraced by their communities and do not always demand services. Several of the women in my study discussed having experiences of past abuse and also reported having no therapeutic services or interventions. Policy implications include providing more culturally and gender specific programs for African American women given the problems they face leading to incarceration. In addition, practitioners must concern themselves with the accessibility of services in the African American community. It may be necessary to forge a campaign to increase service utilization.

African American women however, find their own ways to cope. In my study, I discovered participants had developed protective parenting practices. They made attempts to shield their children from the child welfare system by voluntarily signing their children over to the care of a relative, or allowing children to be cared for by close family friends who took them to church or on family outings with their own children. While these culturally relevant practices provide support, it is recommended that the social service field pay more attention to the gender-specific needs of women in lower resourced communities. Prevention and intervention strategies should be implemented as a way to minimize the likelihood of incarceration due to the spiraling effect of drug use and other symptoms of untreated trauma.

H. **Research Implications**

An unanticipated outcome related to the formerly incarcerated mothers in this

study was their reports of encouragement from their children. My study found that the encouragement formerly incarcerated African American women receive from their children helps them as they transition back to parenting. Further research on the effects of their child(ren)'s encouragement on reducing stigma may be helpful and support the need for continued programs aimed at reconnecting mothers to their children during and post incarceration. In addition, this type of research would help to enhance the literature related to the processes of transitioning back to the parenting role.

Another aspect of transitioning back to the parenting role is the consideration of the multiple ways intersectionality affects women. Two women in my study talked specifically about their sexual orientation and one described her relationship with her same sex partner. Although this did not emerge as a theme I believe it has implications for future research inquiry to see how the intersectionality of multiple identities affects parenting for African American women post release from prison.

In addition, more in depth research is needed on maternal identity related to incarcerated women and the manner in which maternal connection is viewed. The women in this study described their maternal identity in fluid and creative ways and even suggested that they parented from prison. The aspect of parenting from prison should be further explored through both qualitative and quantitative methods. Maternal identity has not been examined in such a way to produce a standard definition or a way to measure it.

I. Social Justice and Policy Implications

This section combines social justice and policy implications because I believe

that they are inextricably linked. Policy needs to be embedded within a social justice framework and needs to be culturally relevant and gender specific in order to more fully address the mass incarceration of women for non-violent crimes. Although there is increasing attention to women's issues in the prison system, more attention is needed to buffer the effects of incarceration and support family reintegration. Years of oppressive legal practices such as the mass herding of African American mothers into the nation's prison system is evidence of marginalization. Researchers need to focus more on the experiences of African American women and the resumption of parenting post release in order to support the families and strengthen communities.

Another finding related to future research is the maintenance of contact and prior relationship with the family caregiver. Examining these factors together in one study with the sole focus on the transition back to parenting would further inform practice—specifically, programs developed for women before, during, and after incarceration. Presentencing programs could help to improve the transition back to the parenting process; this would entail helping the soon-to-be incarcerated woman, her child's family caregiver, and the child(ren) themselves anticipate the vicissitudes of the separation for the entire family system. Current programs utilize criminology literature to enhance services during incarceration. Social workers, researchers and criminologists should work tirelessly to raise awareness about the benefits of maintaining contact with children and promote the sustainability of prison programs that attempt to address the issue of family stability and the reconnection to parenting post release.

Policies around family reintegration, providing counseling to more returning mothers, and follow-up services would enhance the overall transition from prison to home. Many services are already in place and provide excellent services such as the sites used in this study for recruitment. Agencies like Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers, Grace House, Lutheran Social Services' Connections Program and North Lawndale Employment Network continue to serve women returning home from prison and their families. However, sustainable and increased funding is needed to provide the full range of services, expand outreach and funding for research about interventions and service provision. Social workers, criminologists, and other providers need to recognize the unique needs and contexts of the African American woman's experiences, recognize and value their voice as experts about their own lived experiences, and create more opportunities for change. Advocating for marginalized populations is not glamorous work but it is sorely needed. One's station in life should never determine one's worth in life. When we reach out to society's most vulnerable citizens and seek to extract them from the margins of society we strengthen American culture as a whole.

J. Conclusion

The dissertation used qualitative methods employing a Black feminist epistemology and identity theory to examine the experiences of formerly incarcerated African American women. One of the major tenets of the Black feminist epistemology is the understanding of Black women in relation to the multiple forms of oppression they experience in American society.

One third of the research participants in this study experienced living with scarce finances in communities that offered very little by way of community resources. Another third of this

study's sample experienced intimate partner violence as a form of oppression. And yet another third, described more middle class experiences and opportunities.

The incarceration of women requires a more gender focused research aim. Families are impacted by long separations and formerly incarcerated African American women need support as they attempt to reconnect to parenting. Transitioning back to parenting is a process, one that is enhanced when intact relationships are present. Coparenting, kin caregiving and relational support play a role in the resumption of parenting.

This study shows that formerly incarcerated mothers have many strengths. The participants from this study reported having parenting esteem and articulated why they felt good about themselves as parents. In addition, some women took action to protect their children when they were active drug abusers by using extended family networks and friends to support their children and by signing over custody to a trusted relative. Others engaged in coparenting relationships that helped to provide them with the support they needed to reestablish their parental bonds and parental authority.

The women in this study were subject to the influences of race aimed legal practices embedded within a criminal legal system rife with oppressive practices. Nonetheless, the participants in this study focused on making their lives better, reconnecting with their children and working toward improving their lives in general.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL NOTICES

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS)
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (MC 672)
203 Administrative Office Building
1737 West Polk Street
Chicago, Illinois 60612-7227

Approval Notice Initial Review (Response To Modifications)

May 9, 2013

Giesela Grumbach, LCSW
Jane Addams School of Social Work
1040 West Harrison St., M/C 309
Chicago, IL 60607
Phone: (312) 996-7096 / Fax: (312) 996-2770

RE: Protocol # 2013-0117
"Formerly Incarcerated African American Women: Reclaiming Parenting and Re-forming Maternal Identities"

Dear Ms. Grumbach:

Please remember to submit a copy of the transcription service agreement if a non-UIC transcriptionist or transcription service is used. A copy of the agreement must be accompanied by an Amendment form when submitted to the UIC IRB.

Your Initial Review (Response To Modifications) was reviewed and approved by Members of IRB #2 by the Expedited review process on May 2, 2013. You may now begin your research

Please note the following information about your approved research protocol:

Protocol Approval Period: May 2, 2013 - May 2, 2014
Approved Subject Enrollment #: 16
Additional Determinations for Research Involving Minors: These determinations have not been made for this study since it has not been approved for enrollment of minors.
Performance Sites: UIC, North Lawndale Employment Network, Lutheran Social Services Prisoner and Family Ministry Connect, Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers
Sponsor: None
Research Protocol(s):
a) Maternal identity re-information and formerly Incarcerated African American; Version 2, 03-25-2013
Recruitment Material(s):
a) Member Check Script (Appendix G) - Version 1, 03-25-13
b) Recruitment Script (Appendix B) - Version 1, 03-25-13
c) Recruitment Flyer (Appendix A) - Version 2, 03-25-13

Phone: 312-996-1711

<http://www.uic.edu/depts/over/oprs/>

FAX: 312-413-2929

APPENDIX A (continued)

IRB APPROVAL NOTICES

2013-0117

Page 2 of 3

May 9, 2013

Informed Consent(s):

- a) Formerly incarcerated African American women, Consent Form - Version 3, 04-10-13
- b) Waiver of Informed Consent granted under 45 CFR 46.116(d) for Recruitment Purposes Only
- c) Alteration of Informed Consent granted under 45 CFR 46.116(d) for Screening of Potential Subjects
- d) Waiver of Signed Consent Document granted under 45 CFR 46.117(c)
- e) Member Check Focus Group (Appendix F) - Version 1, 03-25-13
- f) Member Check (Appendix C - Part 2) - Version 2, 04-10-13

Your research continues to meet the criteria for expedited review as defined in 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) under the following specific categories:

- (6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.,
- (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including but not limited to research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Please note the Review History of this submission:

Receipt Date	Submission Type	Review Process	Review Date	Review Action
02/06/2013	Initial Review	Convened	02/21/2013	Modifications Required
04/01/2013	Response To Modifications	Expedited	04/04/2013	Modifications Required
04/22/2013	Response To Modifications	Expedited	05/02/2013	Approved

Please remember to:

→ Use your **research protocol number** (2013-0117) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

→ Review and comply with all requirements on the enclosure,

"UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects"

(<http://tiger.uic.edu/depts/ovcr/research/protocolreview/irb/policies/0924.pdf>)

Please note that the UIC IRB has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Please be aware that if the scope of work in the grant/project changes, the protocol must be amended and approved by the UIC IRB before the initiation of the change.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact OPRS at (312) 996-1711 or me at (312) 355-2939. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.

APPENDIX A (continued)

IRB APPROVAL NOTICES

2013-0117

Page 3 of 3

May 9, 2013

Sincerely,



Jewell Hamilton, MSW
IRB Coordinator, IRB # 2
Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

Enclosure(s):

1. **UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects**
2. **Informed Consent Document(s):**
 - a) Formerly incarcerated African American women, Consent Form - Version 3, 04-10-13
 - b) Member Check Focus Group (Appendix F) - Version 1, 03-25-13
 - c) Member Check (Appendix C - Part 2) - Version 2, 04-10-13
3. **Recruiting Material(s):**
 - a) Member Check Script (Appendix G) - Version 1, 03-25-13
 - b) Recruitment Script (Appendix B) - Version 1, 03-25-13
 - c) Recruitment Flyer (Appendix A) - Version 2, 03-25-13

cc: Kimberly Lawless, Jane Addams School of Social Work, M/C 309
M. Patricia O'Brien, Faculty Sponsor, Jane Addams School of Social Work, M/C 309

APPENDIX A (continued)

IRB APPROVAL NOTICES

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS)
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (MC 672)
203 Administrative Office Building
1737 West Polk Street
Chicago, Illinois 60612-7227

Approval Notice
Amendment to Research Protocol and/or Consent Document – Expedited Review
UIC Amendment # 1

July 10, 2013

Giesela Grumbach, LCSW
Jane Addams School of Social Work
1040 West Harrison St., M/C 309
Chicago, IL 60607
Phone: (312) 996-7096 / Fax: (312) 996-2770

RE: Protocol # 2013-0117
“Formerly Incarcerated African American Women: Reclaiming Parenting and Re-forming Maternal Identities”

Dear Ms. Grumbach:

Members of Institutional Review Board (IRB) #2 have reviewed this amendment to your research and/or consent form under expedited procedures for minor changes to previously approved research allowed by Federal regulations [45 CFR 46.110(b)(2)]. The amendment to your research was determined to be acceptable and may now be implemented.

Please note the following information about your approved amendment:

Amendment Approval Date: July 9, 2013

Amendment:

Summary: UIC Amendment #1 dated June 21, 2013, received July 3, 2013, is an investigator-initiated amendment to add Teena Purohit as a transcriber (key research personnel) (Appendix P).

Please note the Review History of this submission:

Receipt Date	Submission Type	Review Process	Review Date	Review Action
07/03/2013	Amendment	Expedited	07/09/2013	Approved

Please be sure to:

→ Use only the IRB-approved and stamped consent document(s) and/or HIPAA Authorization form(s) enclosed with this letter when enrolling subjects.

→ Use your research protocol number (2013-0117) on any documents or correspondence with the

Phone: 312-996-1711

<http://www.uic.edu/depts/ovcr/oprs/>

FAX: 312-413-2929

APPENDIX A (continued)

IRB APPROVAL NOTICES

2013-0117

Page 2 of 2

July 10, 2013

IRB concerning your research protocol.

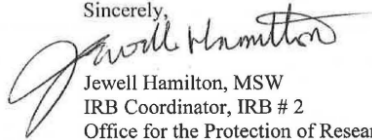
→ Review and comply with all requirements on the enclosure,
"UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects"
(<http://tiger.uic.edu/depts/ovcr/research/protocolreview/irb/policies/0924.pdf>)

Please note that the UIC IRB #2 has the right to ask further questions, seek additional information, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Please be aware that if the scope of work in the grant/project changes, the protocol must be amended and approved by the UIC IRB before the initiation of the change.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the OPRS at (312) 996-1711 or me at (312) 355-2939. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.

Sincerely,



Jewell Hamilton, MSW
IRB Coordinator, IRB # 2
Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

Enclosure(s): None

cc: M. Patricia O'Brien, Faculty Sponsor, Jane Addams School of Social Work, M/C 309
Creasie Hairston, Jane Addams School of Social Work, M/C 309

APPENDIX A (continued)

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

2013-0117

Page 2 of 2

February 28, 2014

or practices and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Please note the Review History of this submission:

Receipt Date	Submission Type	Review Process	Review Date	Review Action
02/18/2014	Continuing Review	Expedited	02/25/2014	Approved

Please remember to:

→ Use your **research protocol number** (2013-0117) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

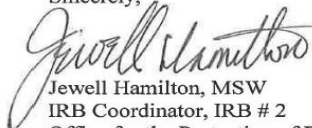
→ Review and comply with all requirements on the enclosure,
"UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects"
(<http://tiger.uic.edu/depts/ovcr/research/protocolreview/irb/policies/0924.pdf>)

Please note that the UIC IRB has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Please be aware that if the scope of work in the grant/project changes, the protocol must be amended and approved by the UIC IRB before the initiation of the change.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact OPRS at (312) 996-1711 or me at (312) 355-2939. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.

Sincerely,



Jewell Hamilton, MSW
IRB Coordinator, IRB # 2
Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

Enclosure(s): None

cc: Creasie Hairston, Jane Addams School of Social Work, M/C 309
 M. Patricia O'Brien, Faculty Sponsor, Jane Addams School of Social Work, M/C 309

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT FLYER

APPENDIX A
Recruitment Flyer

STARTS **APPROVAL** EXPIRES
MAY 02 2013 TO MAY 02 2014

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Are you an African American woman who has previously been incarcerated?

I am conducting a study to learn more about how African American women parent again post release from prison.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to:

- Participate in a taped interview (1.5 hours) and give details about your experiences as a parent after exiting prison
- Talk about your relationship with your child's family caregiver
- Talk about your self as a parent

You may be a part of this study if:

- ☐ You are an African American woman, 18 years or older, who was incarcerated for *at least* one year or more as an adult in an Illinois prison) and have been released **not less than a month and not more than three years**
- ☐ You live in the Metropolitan Chicago land area
- ☐ You are a parent of a minor age child (17 years or younger)
- ☐ Your child was in the care of a family member while you were incarcerated
- ☐ You agree to discuss your experiences about your relationship with your child's family caregiver

Participants will be given a \$20.00 gift card. If you are interested in learning more about becoming a part of this research study, please call: (773) 412-7390.

Giesela Grumbach, LCSW
Doctoral Candidate

Jane Addams College of Social Work
University of Illinois at Chicago
1040 W. Harrison Street (M/C 309)
Chicago, IL 60607-7134

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

APPENDIX B:

Recruitment Script

STARTS **APPROVAL** EXPIRES

MAY 02 2013 TO MAY 02 2014

Introduction

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Hello – thank you for your interest in my study. I am doing this study to explore African American women's post-incarceration experiences regaining their relationship with their children. The interview you will participate in (if you agree to be a part of this study) will be a face-to-face interview that will be approximately an hour and a half. I will interview between 12-16 women.

Is it okay if I ask you some questions first to see if you are eligible for the study?

[Questions]:

1. Do you self-identify as African American or Black?
2. Are you able to attend the interview alone?
3. Are you over the age of 18?
4. Do you live in the Chicago metropolitan area?
5. Have you been incarcerated as an adult for at least one year?
6. How long have you been released from prison?
 - o Have you been released from prison longer than one month?
 - o Have you been released from prison for less than three years?
7. Do you have children under the age of 17?
8. Did these children live with a relative caregiver during your incarceration?
9. After your release from prison, did you attempt (or are you still attempting) to regain your relationships with your children?

If **NOT** Eligible: *I am sorry but based on the information you have given me you are not eligible to participate in this particular study. Thank you for your time and I appreciate your willingness to participate.*

If **YES** Eligible: Based on the information you have given me you are eligible to participate in this study. The place of the interview may vary based on your preference of where to meet. [I would suggest – at a local library – like: a confidential office at UIC College of Social Work, the Woodson Library on 95th Halsted or Harold Washington Library on Roosevelt Road]. At _____ o'clock AM or PM (circle one).

May I have a telephone number where I might reach you to confirm our appointment? By telling me this information you are consenting to give me your information.

Giesela Grumbach, LCSW
Doctoral Candidate

Jane Addams College of Social Work
University of Illinois at Chicago
1040 W. Harrison Street (M/C 309)
Chicago, IL 60607-7134

Formerly incarcerated African American Women

Recruitment Script – Version 1

Date: 03-25-13
Page 1 of 1

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

Leave box empty - For office use only	
STARTs APPROVAL EXPIRES	
MAY 02 2013	TO MAY 02 2014
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD	

University of Illinois at Chicago
Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research

Formerly incarcerated African American women: Reclaiming parenting and re-forming maternal identities

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the research, to explain that taking part is voluntary, to describe the risks and benefits of participation, and to help you to make an informed decision.

You should feel free to ask the researcher any questions you may have.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: Giesela Grumbach / Doctoral Candidate
Department and Institution: Graduate College of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago
Address and Contact Information: 1040 W. Harrison Street, Chicago, IL 60607-7134
Sponsor: N/A

Why am I being asked?

You are being asked to be a subject in a research study about your experiences as an African American mother who has been incarcerated and has attempted to resume parenting post incarceration

You have been asked to participate in the research because you are a mother (over the age of 18) of a child age 17 or younger, you were incarcerated (in an Illinois prison as an adult) for at least one year, you have been released for over one month and not more than 3 years, you have expressed a desire to or have made attempts to resume parenting since release from prison, and your child was cared for by a relative during the time you were in prison. You live in the Chicago metropolitan area.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future dealings with the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). **If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.** Please note that your decision to decline or participate will not affect your relationship with any segment of the criminal justice system, nor will your decision to decline or participate be communicated to a parole/probation officer or other monitor. Nor will your relationship with any of the recruiting agencies be affected by your decision to either decline or participate in this study.

APPENDIX D (continued)

CONSENT FORM

2

Approximately 12 - 16 subjects may be involved in this research at UIC. The maximum number of subjects for this study is 16. You have been recruited from one of the following program sites: Lutheran Social Services (LSS) Connections Program; North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN), or Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers (CLAIM). One of the above sites referred you to be screened as a potential research subject in my study (Chicago metropolitan area, USA).

What is the purpose of this research?

In the past few decades there has been a dramatic rise in incarceration in the United States. African American women, in particular, have been represented in large numbers in the prison system. The majority of these women are mothers who will return home to reestablish parenting relationships and routines that have been interrupted by their incarceration.

My study will focus on the narratives of African American women post incarceration to learn how their maternal identity is re-formed and how they reclaim/resume parenting. In addition, the study will focus on the relationship between you and your child's family caregiver and how these things affect you as you resume parenting and re-form your maternal identity.

The researcher is trying to learn more about the following three questions:

- (1) What are the experiences of African American formerly incarcerated women as they reclaim parenting?
- (2) What do African American women believe is necessary for successful reclamation of parenting after release from prison?
- (3) How does relational support and interaction with their child's family caregiver influence the former inmate's maternal identity?

What procedures are involved?

This research will be performed at a place that is convenient to you, your home, or possibly at the University of Illinois at Chicago at a private office or conference room or even a local library (in a private study room).

You will need to come to the study site only one time and will be there for up to 1.5 hours. If you decide to participate in the member check group (a one time only meeting) you will be there for approximately one hour. The entire research project will interview participants no more than two times (if you attend the member check focus group as well).

Data collection will take place over a 4 – 6 month timeframe. Each interview will take up to an hour to an hour and a half (no interview will be longer than an hour and a half).

The study procedures are as follows:

- You will be interviewed by the PI one time for an hour and a half
- You will be interviewed at a location that is comfortable for you

Formerly incarcerated African American women Consent Form – Version 3

Date: 04-10-13
Page 2 of 6

APPENDIX D (continued)

CONSENT FORM

3

- You will receive one \$20.00 gift card for the initial interview and one \$15.00 gift card if they participate in the member check focus group
- You will be given a list of community resources
- The interview session will be audio recorded.
 - Yes, I agree for my interview to be audio recorded ☐
 - No, I do not agree for my interview to be audio recorded ☐
- You may be re-contacted at a later time to ask for your participation in a one time member check focus group (*with three other research subjects*)

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

It is possible that you may feel uneasy answering some questions. The risks or discomforts are considered to be minimal. However, if you experience any distress during the interview you may request to stop at any point without any consequence. I will provide you with a referral list if you feel you are in need of counseling for you to follow up with at your own discretion/choice.

There may be risks from the study that are not known at this time. If this is the case, as stated above you will have a list of resources to use whenever you choose. To the best of my knowledge, the things you will be doing will have no more risk of harm than you would experience in your everyday life. There is no experimental intervention or interaction in the context of this research.

A risk of this research is a loss of privacy (revealing to others that you are taking part in this study) or confidentiality (revealing information about you to others to whom you have not given permission to see this information). There is a possibility that staff at any of the recruitment agencies (CLAIM, NLEN, LSS) will know that you are participating in this study. The professional transcriptionist will also know what is said, but will not link any identifying information to what they hear in the audio recordings.

Are there benefits to taking part in the research?

This study is not designed to benefit you directly. This study is designed to learn more about how parents resume parenting after being released from prison. The study results may be used to help other people in the future.

What other options are there?

You have the option to not participate in this study.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

The people who will know that you are a research subject are members of the research team and possibly staff at one of the recruitment agencies. A transcriptionist will also know what was said during interview. Otherwise information about you will only be disclosed to others with your written permission, or if necessary to protect your rights or welfare or if required by law.

APPENDIX D (continued)

CONSENT FORM

4

Identifiable study information may be looked at and/or copied by: the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UIC and State of Illinois Auditors.

Findings for this study will only be reported in aggregate; no identifying information will be linked to what you say in the interview. When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

- All personal information will be given a fake name (pseudonym) and will be stored in a locked file cabinet where only I have access.
- Your personal information will not be shared with anyone else to protect confidentiality.
- The study's findings may be published or presented at conferences, but only in a way that removes all personal and identifying information to protect confidentiality.
- All audio tapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet – where unauthorized persons will not have access
- Audio tapes will be destroyed at the end of the study

For **member checks** (focus group): Although we ask everyone in the group to respect everyone's privacy and confidentiality, and not to identify anyone in the group or repeat what is said during the group discussion, please remember that other participants in the group may accidentally disclose what was said.

Your private, identifiable information will be kept confidential and will only be used for research and statistical purposes.

The PI is a mandated reporter and is under legal obligation to report any suspicion of abuse or self-harm that is disclosed by a participant. If the PI becomes aware that you may cause serious harm to yourself or others, the PI may report this to the appropriate authorities (the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services or the Illinois Department on Aging) without your consent.

What are the costs for participating in this research?

There are no costs to you for participating in this research.

Will I be reimbursed for any of my expenses or paid for my participation in this research?

Participation in this study will include **one** \$20.00 Visa gift card to help offset your travel, time and effort. You will be given the gift card at the beginning of the interview. Should you decide not to complete the interview you will not be asked to return the gift card – you have a right to withdraw at any time. Those who participate in the member check focus group will receive a \$15.00 Visa gift card.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. If you wish to leave, please inform me at any point during the interview. We will

APPENDIX D (continued)

CONSENT FORM

5

wrap things up and you will be free to leave at any time without penalty. There are no consequences for you withdrawing from the study.

Researchers also have the right to stop your participation in this study without your consent if:

- The researcher believes it is in your best interests.
- You become noticeably distressed, anxious or agitated.
- The questions make you too sad to continue.

In the event you withdraw or are asked to leave the study, you will still be compensated as described above. You will be able to keep the gift card you received at the beginning of the interview.

☐ Yes, I agree to be re-contacted for the member check group

☐ No, I do not agree to be re-contacted for the member check group

Who should I contact if I have questions?

Contact the researchers Giesela Grumbach at (773) 412-7390 or email address: grumbach@uic.edu (1) if you have any questions about this study or your part in it, if you feel you need another referral for counseling due to distress, or (3) if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research.

You may also contact my faculty sponsor: Dr. Patricia O'Brien, at UIC: 312-996-7096 or email address: pob@uic.edu.

What are my rights as a research subject?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including questions, concerns, complaints, or to offer input, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 312-996-1711 or 1-866-789-6215 (toll-free) or e-mail OPRS at uicirb@uic.edu.

Remember:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

Signature of Subject

I have read (or someone has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.

APPENDIX D (continued)

CONSENT FORM

6	
Signature _____	Date _____
Printed Name _____	
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent _____	Date (must be same as subject's) _____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent _____	
Formerly incarcerated African American women Consent Form – Version 3 Date: 04-10-13 Page 6 of 6	

APPENDIX E

SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

APPENDIX C (1)

Semi Structured Interview Guide

(Introduce myself and the purpose of the interview) - Thank you for taking time to participate in this study. I really appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about your parenting experiences and I hope what we discuss will help other women in your position. Today's interview is for a study I am conducting to learn more about formerly incarcerated women and how they interact with their children after release from prison. This study also looks at how you feel about your role as a parent.

This face-to-face audio-recorded interview will take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours to complete and includes the completion of all paper work. If you need to take a break at any point during the interview please let me know. Also, you are free to skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering. Should you wish to discontinue the interview altogether please let me know; you are under no obligation to complete the interview.

I will ask questions about how you interact with your child, I will ask about your relationship with your child's caregiver, and I will ask questions about the way you see yourself as a parent. In addition, I will ask you to talk about the type of support you received as you resumed parenting

(Do you have any questions before we get started?)

[TURN ON THE RECORDER – TEST THE SOUND LEVEL WITH THE PARTICIPANT / REMIND HER TO SPEAK CLEARLY]

First, I would like to complete the personal data portion of the interview. All of this information is confidential and an assumed name, of your choice, will be assigned to your information.

SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

*Use separate paper to remove any identifying/demographic information.

APPENDIX E (continued)

SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

African American Women's Parenting Experiences and Relationships (let's begin with questions about your parenting experiences and relationship(s) with your children).

1. **Tell me about your child/children?**
Probe: Describe your relationship *prior to* going to prison.
2. **How would you describe your relationship with your child/children since you have been released from prison?** Probe: Tell me more about what you did to resume parenting.
3. **How were you able to maintain contact with your child/children while you were in prison?** Probe: In what ways did you maintain contact – by letters, phone, or face-to-face visits (how often)?
4. **How did you decide who should care for your child/children while you were in prison?** Probe: Was it based on a relationship, on convenience, or based on familial /cultural expectations? Was this the only person available or the best person available? Can you describe this further?
5. **What type of relationship did you have with your child's caregiver prior to prison? What type of relationship did your child have with their caregiver prior to you going to prison?** Probe: Tell me more about you and your child's family caregiver.

Experiences Reclaiming Parenting (next we'll discuss your experiences parenting since your release from prison)

6. **What prepared you to parent after your release from prison?** Probe: Say more – give me specific examples.
7. **What made you comfortable with the role of parenting after prison?** Probe: Give specific examples (was it a person, a program, co-parenting or some other experience and please explain).
8. **Describe the type of relationship you had with your child's family caregiver after release from prison.** Probe: Did it influence your ideas about parenting in any way?
9. **What does the "parent role" mean to you?** Probe: What does it mean to be a parent? What are the roles, responsibilities, tasks, or commitments of the parent role?

Aspects of the Relational Processes and Maternal Identity (Finally, we'll talk about how you view yourself as a mother and what type of support you received)

10. **Did your child's family caregiver support you?** Probe: Explain the kind of support you received. Was it mostly concrete or mostly emotional?

APPENDIX E (continued)

SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

11. **What experiences shaped the way you feel about yourself as a parent?** Probe: Tell me how? Give examples.
12. **Has your view of yourself as a parent changed since your release from prison?** Probe: Tell me more about how your perceptions changed.
13. **Did you have a role model for parenting?** Probes: What experiences shape the way you feel about yourself as a parent? Whose parenting influenced you the most, and why?
14. **What type of feedback did you get from others that has influenced how you see yourself as a parent today?** Probe: Were you influenced by something they said or something they did? What was that (be specific)?
15. **What kind of parent did you dream of being?** Probes: Tell me more. What influenced the change? If there was no change – why do you believe there was no change? How did things stay the same?

Wrap Up Questions (next, I'll ask you a few wrap up questions)

16. **Is there anything I didn't ask that you want to talk about regarding your parenting experience?**
17. **What has been the most helpful to you since your release?** Probe: Please explain. Can you give some specific examples of how it was helpful to you as a parent?
18. **What was it like for you to do this interview?** Probe: How was it answering these questions?

APPENDIX F

MEMBER CHECK CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

APPENDIX F

Member Check – Focus Group
Confidentiality Statement
University of Illinois

STARTS **APPROVAL** EXPIRES

MAY 02 2013 TO MAY 02 2014

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

You are being asked to participate in a member check/focus group. The member check helps me, the researcher, check my interpretations of the data as related to the overall group experience. I am not asking you to reflect on your own personal responses and I am not asking you to discuss issues of a personal nature.

By signing this form - you agree to maintain confidentiality – this means you agree not to discuss anything that is talked about during the course of this 1 to 1.5 hour long focus group.

To review, this group is:

- Voluntary (you are not required to participate)
- You may leave at any point (should you experience any distress)
- You agree to participating in the focus group
- You agree to not discuss what happens in the focus session with anyone

Do you have any questions?

Signature

Date

Giesela Grumbach, LCSW
Doctoral Candidate

Jane Addams College of Social Work
University of Illinois at Chicago
1040 W. Harrison Street (M/C 309)
Chicago, IL 60607-7134

APPENDIX G

MEMBER CHECK SCRIPT

APPENDIX G
University of Illinois at Chicago

STARTS **APPROVAL** EXPIRES

MAY 02 2013 TO MAY 02 2014

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Welcome and thank you for agreeing to take part in this member check - focus group. The purpose of the member check is talk with you to about the *general experiences* of women in this study.

As a participant you will be given a \$15.00 gift card as compensation for your time. If you become uncomfortable during the focus group – let me know, I will stop, give you a referral for counseling/services and you will be free to leave.

I will share with you a few interpretations I have made from the interview findings. I have selected several themes from the interviews [*on a large piece of news print that I will take with me when I leave*] and will ask you as a group to discuss or clarify the statement/interpretation. You may write your responses on post-it paper (for privacy and place it on the large news print) or wait for discussion to give your input.

I will take notes from what you say during the focus group session. Anything you say will only be reported in the context of the research report (*in general terms and will not include identifiable information from focus group participants*).

By participating in this group each person agrees to:

- Keep all information shared during the focus group confidential – this means you agree not to discuss this with anyone outside of the group
- Respect each group member by listening when they speak
- Respect each group member by not interrupting them as they speak
- Respect each group member's opinion (*even if you do not agree with them*)

If you have any questions about this focus group, you may leave a message for me by dialing: 773-412-7390. I appreciate your participation as it may benefit other women who will also experience the resumption of parenting.

APPENDIX H

CODEBOOK

Appendix H - Codebook

Code	Description	Example from data
<u>Black Feminist Epistemology</u>	Participant gives examples of being a Black woman.	"I think as an African American woman you just struggle through it... I definitely suffered from postpartum depression. I didn't seek help..."
<u>Caregiver Trust</u>	Participants describe what was important to them in choosing who would care for their children.	"I know my daughter is responsible that's why I chose my daughter... she's going to make sure he is okay."
<u>Coparenting</u>	Participants describe coparenting situations.	"Me and his father – we do teamwork with him."
<u>Encouragement from children</u>	Mothers'/participants' talk about how helpful their children have been – giving them words of encouragement.	"I get nothing but praises from my children ...even before and now after [incarceration]."
<u>History of Abuse & Loss</u>	Participants talk about abuse and loss they have experienced in the past in a spontaneous manner.	"I was molested several times... me and my sister..."
<u>Maternal Identity</u>	Participants views of who they are as a mother. Meaning is captured in *subthemes – as outlined in italics below.	
<i>Subthemes: Dreams of being a parent</i>	<i>Participants describe the type of parent associated with their view of parenting - provider.</i>	"I wanted to provide everything for my kids!"
<i>Desires for children</i>	<i>Participants describe their desires/aspirations for their children – want them to do better than they did in life.</i>	"Have a successful life... be able to provide for themselves... be well-rounded people."

APPENDIX H (continued)

CODEBOOK

Appendix H - Codebook

Code	Description	Example from data
<i>Parenting Esteem</i>	<i>Participants describe how they feel about they are as a parent – expressing a high sense of parenting esteem.</i>	“I have very high self-esteem.” As far as being a parent, I don’t see myself as less a parent because I’ve been incarcerated.”
<i>Coping with being separated</i>	<i>Parents talked about what they did to cope with being separated from their children during incarceration.</i>	“At first I would cry every day... all I could think about was what they were doing and what I was missing. So taking away that emotional side ...gave me a chance to get away from that... I had to withdraw... [to] stop crying.”
<i>Protective Parenting</i>	<i>Parents describe what efforts they made to protect their children from their drug use/abuse.</i>	“I wanted to protect them and not allow them to be around my drug usage.”
<u>Parenting Transition</u>	Participants explain parenting transition – related to the outlined <i>*subthemes in italics</i> below.	
<u>Subthemes:</u> <i>Positive connections</i>	<i>Participants were in tune with their children and expressed having positive connections with them.</i>	<i>“I knew what foods they like, what gave them allergies, what they don’t like... [even] in my addiction.”</i>
<i>Preparation for parenting</i>	<i>Participants' expressions about how their children have encouraged them.</i>	<i>“Being able to be a mother from prison really helped a whole lot in my transition coming home and...getting back into the parenting role.”</i>

APPENDIX H (continued)

CODEBOOK

Appendix H - Codebook

Code	Description	Example from data
<i>Parenting—as automatic</i>	<i>Participants describe their transition as an automatic thing that they have to do as if no preparation is needed.</i>	<i>“I don’t know if anything prepared me...you don’t forget...you go back and continue...”</i>
<i>Parenting—as process</i>	<i>Participants describe parenting as if it is a process – something that requires adjustments (for them and their children).</i>	<i>“I really couldn’t jump right back into it like I hadn’t left at all. I really [take] slow paces, like compromising...I’m not trying to change... [their] routine.”</i>
<u>Subthemes:</u>		
<i>Maintaining Contact</i>	<i>Participants’ discussions about how contact was maintained with their children while incarcerated.</i>	<i>“What prepared me [to resume parenting] was ...taking the parenting classes and just the visits.”</i>
<i>Relationship as a conduit</i>	<i>Participants describe how their relationships help them as they resume parenting.</i>	<i>“She would give me advice and ...tell me to keep pushing forward, and it made a difference to me – to know that somebody cared.”</i>
<i>Responsibilities</i>	<i>Participants describe their view of parenting and the responsibilities associated with it.</i>	<i>“[Being the one they can] go to for security, Protection, and ...just basically knowing I’m there for them...”</i>

APPENDIX H (continued)

CODEBOOK

Appendix H - Codebook

Code	Description	Example from data
<u>Relational Support</u>	Participants describe the types of support they received from people with whom they have relationships and how this helped to affirm or support them emotionally, spiritually and provided them with guidance.	“She supported me [by] saying-never give up. You can do it. If it get[s] tough, I will hold you up.”
<u>Support – program</u>	Participants talk about the programmatic supports they received and what it meant to them.	“They help you get acclimated back into society and also get reconnected with your children.”

VITA

Giesela Grumbach, PhD, MSW, LCSW

EDUCATION

-
- | | |
|------|--|
| 2014 | Doctor of Philosophy
Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago
Chicago, IL
<u>Dissertation Title:</u> Formerly incarcerated African American women: Reclaiming parenting and re-forming maternal identities.
Chair: Patricia O'Brien, PhD |
| | Master of Social Work
Loyola University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
Specialization: Clinical Social Work |
| | Bachelor of Arts
Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, IL
Major: Sociology
Minors: Psychology and Spanish |

AREAS OF RESEARCH AND SPECIALIZATION

Family restoration / Formerly Incarcerated Women / African American Women & Intersectionality / Gender Specific Treatment / Management and Leadership / Social Justice

TEACHING INTERESTS

Social Work Practice; Management and Leadership in the Human Services; Introduction to Social Work; and Integrative Field Seminar

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 2013 - Present | Director of Field Education / College of Health & Human Services
Social Work Department / Governors State University, University Park, Illinois |
| 2011 - 2013 | Full Time Lecturer / College of Health & Human Services - Social Work Department
Governors State University, University Park, Illinois |
| 2008 - Present | Adjunct Professor, Columbia College Chicago / HHSS
Course: Social Problems in American Society |
| 2000 – 2011 | Extension Educator, Family Life / Interim County Director (2005 – 2007)
College of Agriculture, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences (ACES)
University of Illinois Extension, Champaign-Urbana, Illinois |

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2010 – 2011	Adjunct Professor Course: Violence Across the Lifespan Dominican University / River Forest, Illinois
2000, 2006, 2011	Adjunct Professor / Governors State University, University Park, Illinois Courses: Inter-Professional Teamwork in the Health and Human Services, Community Development and Group Work, Management & Supervision in the Human Services, Social Welfare Policies (Provisions) and Integrative Seminar.
1993, 2004, 2006, 2009	Adjunct Professor Courses: Life Span Development and the Sociology of Social Problems. Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois
1993, 2004, 2006, 2010	Adjunct Professor / Life Span Development - Social Problems Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois

ENDORSEMENTS

State Certification – Type 73 - School Social Work
Certificate in Marriage and Family Therapy
State License – Clinical Social Work (LCSW)

SOCIAL WORK EXPERIENCE

1995 – 2002	Private Practice [Mitigation/Therapy] Chicago, Illinois
1991 – 2000	Chicago Public Schools, School Social Worker Chicago, Illinois
1990 – 1991	United Way/ Crusade of Mercy, Rothschild Fellow Chicago, Illinois
1984 – 1987 1989 - 1990	Cabrini Green Legal Aid Clinic, Fund-raiser Program Administrator Chicago, Illinois
1987 – 1989	Westside Veterans Administration, Clinical Social Worker Chicago, Illinois

FUNDED GRANTS

- 2007 Federal Grant from the U. S. Women's Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Women's Health / Used for Provider's Conference on Domestic Violence
- 2006 United Way / South Suburban Grant
Interim County Director/Grant Writer / 4-H Youth Program, \$15,000
- 1984 Chicago Community Trust, Matching Grant
Cabrini Green Legal Aid Clinic
Intern / Direct solicitations from lawyers & law firms, \$60,000

NON-REFEREED PUBLICATIONS

- Grumbach, G., & McCoy, J. (2008). Curriculum: Family Violence: Broken Hearts, Broken Promises
A Focus across the Lifespan. University of Illinois Board of Trustees / Extension.
- Grumbach, G. (2008). How Do We Communicate with Our Children about These Economically Stressful
Times? Getting through Tough Financial Times. University of Illinois Board of Trustees /
Extension. http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/toughtimes/communicating_with_children.cfm
- Grumbach, G. (2007). Developing Emotionally Skilled Children. Parenting 24/7 web site.
University of Illinois Board of Trustees / Extension.
- Sánchez, B., Renfro, R. L., Juárez, G., Hudson, J., Peguero, D., Gracia, A., Grumbach, G., Washington,
L., Ortiz, J., & Stevens, E. (2006, October). Culture does count: How cultural, community and
societal forces influence the mental health of Latina women. Paper presented at the Biennial
Meeting of the National Latino Psychology Association, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
- Grumbach, G. (2006). "Handling Sexually Inappropriate Behavior: For Childcare Providers."
Nibbles Newsletter: University of Illinois Board of Trustees / Extension.
- Grumbach, G. & Barsley-Marra, B. L. (2006). Curriculum: Forgiveness – the gift you give
yourself. University of Illinois Board of Trustees / Extension.
- Grumbach, G. (2005- 2007). President's Pen / NASW - Networker. Quarterly entries.
- Griswold, A. & Grumbach, G. (2003). Curriculum Unit - Managing Work and Extended Family and
Friends. Intentional Harmony Curricula: University of Illinois Board of Trustees / Extension.
- Grumbach, G. (2002). "Career Choice: What Parents Can Do to Help." University of Illinois Extension
Quarterly, Summer 2002. University of Illinois Board of Trustees / Extension.
- Grumbach, G. (2001). "Where Do Babies Come From?" Nibbles Newsletter: University of Illinois Board
of Trustees / Extension.

Grumbach, G. (2001). "Separation and Loss: Helping Your Grandchild Adjust." Issue (7). Nibbles Newsletter: University of Illinois Board of Trustees / Extension.

Grumbach, G. (2001). Strengthening Emotional Connections. Issue (13). Nibbles Newsletter: University of Illinois Board of Trustees / Extension.

Grumbach, G. (1997). Social Work in Cyberspace. Chicago Public Schools: Social Worker's Forum.

BOOK REVIEWS

Grumbach, G. (2013). Book Review: Whatever it takes: Geoffrey Canada's quest to change Harlem and America, *Families in Society*, 1. ISSN: Electronic 1945-135. DOI: 10.1606/1945-1350.4313.

Grumbach, G. (2010). Book Review: A practical guide to autism: What every parent, family member, and teacher needs to know, *Families in Society*, 91 (0). Published Online.

Grumbach, G. (2010). Book Review: Clinical Handbook of Schizophrenia, *Families in Society*, 91 (0). Published Online.

Grumbach, G. (1994). Book Review: The Clinical Textbook of Addictive Disorders, *Journal of School Social Work*, Spring.

INVITED ADDRESSES

Grumbach, G. (2006, May). Preparing to Enter the Field of Social Work. Invited Keynote Address at Loyola University's Graduation Celebration for Minority MSW Graduates/ M.A.R.C. program.

Grumbach, G. (2006, February). Social Work and the Civil Rights Movement: The Future of Social Work. Invited speaker for Black History Month. Dominican University.

HONORS

2013-14 CSWE Minority Fellowship (Competitive Award)

2013 Provost Deiss Award, Dissertation Research
University of Illinois at Chicago, Graduate College

2006 Multicultural Alumni Resource Committee / Barbara Bacon Award
Loyola University of Chicago, Illinois

2003 Florence Hall Team Award / Intentional Harmony Curriculum Development
National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences

JURIED PRESENTATIONS

Grumbach, G. (2007). Preventing Burnout in the Workplace. National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Chapter Statewide Conference.

Austin, N., Blalock, L., Doll, K., Grumbach, G., Ogutu, M., & Theuri, E. (2006). Measure Your Success, Share Your Impact: Increasing Program Development, Evaluation and Scholarship Capacity in Organizations. Children, Youth, and Families at Risk (CYFAR) Conference.

OTHER PRESENTATIONS

Grumbach, G. (2013). African American Researchers Forum. Presentation: Formerly incarcerated African American women: Reclaiming parenting and re-forming maternal identities. Governors State University, University Park, Illinois.

Grumbach, G. (2007). Parenting and Stress. Latino Family Bridges Conference. Chicago, Illinois.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Chapter

COLLEGE SERVICE

2009 – 2010 Regional Grantsmanship Committee / University of Illinois Extension

2008 – 2009 National Extension Leadership Development (NELD) / Fellow
University of Illinois Extension

2005 – 2007 Field Staff Advisory Council / Secretary
University of Illinois Extension

2003 – 2005 Statewide Technology Committee
University of Illinois Extension

Department Service/ University of Illinois Extension

2009 – Present Regional Committee for Grantsmanship

2007 – 2009 Statewide Program Planning Committee

2007 – Present Fiscal Chair / Matteson Center

2007 – 2009 Evaluation Committee / Team Chair

2007 – 2008 Chair, Family Life Statewide Team

2005 – 2007 Statewide Field Staff Advisory Committee / Secretary

2001 – 2003 Regional Advisory Committee

Service to the Profession

2011 - 2012 Consulting Editor
Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services

2007 – 2007 National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Chapter
Delegate Elect / Delegate Assembly

2004 – 2007 National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Chapter
President Elect 1 year / President 2 years

2002 – 2006 Governors State University, University Park, Illinois
Advisory Board – MSW Program

2002 – 2003 National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Chapter
Political Action Committee (PAC)

2000 – 2006 Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois
Advisory Board – MSW Program

2000 – 2002 National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Chapter
Chicago Area District Chair, Elect

Public, Civic, & Professional Service

2009 – 2010 Local Area Network (LAN 53) / Conducted Needs Assessment

2007 – Present Red Cross Mental Health Volunteer
Red Cross Chapter, Chicago, Illinois

2005 – 2009 Economic Development Commission
Appointed by the Mayor
City of Country Club Hills, Illinois

2002 Blacks in Technology - Volunteer
Children's Technology Lounge
Navy Pier, Chicago, Illinois

2003	National Association of Social Workers/International Activities Network Durban, South Africa – Exchange Program /Presentations (South African Consulate/ various Schools of Social Work)
2001	University of Illinois Extension, New Worker Orientation Volunteer at a local Domestic Violence Shelter, Bloomington, Illinois
1996 – 2000	Career Day Speaker/Social Work Chicago Public Schools/ South Loop Elementary School
1983	PACE Institute Cook County Jail / Tutoring Inmates Trinity Christian College Volunteer Program/ Chicago, Illinois

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – COMPETITIVE SELECTION PROCESS

2005 – 2007	National Extension Leadership Development Training 2 year training /Competitive selection based criteria
-------------	---

POST-GRADUATE TRAININGS

2009	Forty (40) hour – Domestic Violence Training South Suburban Family Shelter
2008	Continuing Education Harvard School of Education – Two Day /Seminar Parent Involvement
1999	Mediation Service / Mediation Training – 40 hour
1997 – 1999	Northwestern University Family Institute/ Two Year Post Graduation Certification in Marriage and Family Therapy
1997	University of Chicago /SSA - Social Work Licensure Review Course