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The scholarly literature has addressed several instances in which Black women experience oppression in their daily lives and within their community (e.g., stigmatization, housing inequality, healthcare, education, employment, policing, and systemic racism in community infrastructure) (Unnever, Gabbidon, Chouhy 2019). Structural racism exposes Black women to harmful stressors in U.S. society and its institutions, especially the Criminal Justice System (CJS). In the CJS, Black women continue to remain overrepresented and more likely than their racial counterparts to be incarcerated (Hinton, Henderson, Red 2018). The literature has also examined and uncovered several pathways to involvement in the CJS for women. These pathways include early experiences of trauma and victimization, substance abuse, and intimate partner violence (Yingling 2016; Richie 1996; Potter 2006). For many women, prison exacerbates these experiences causing significant collateral consequences such as emotional distress, loss of income, and residential instability. Based on semi-structured interviews with six formerly incarcerated women, this study unearths the lived realities of these Black women with a history of involvement in the CJS. Three critical theoretical and frameworks were employed to guide the study: (1) Black Feminist Criminology (BFC)/ Intersectionality, (2) Pathways Perspective (PT), and (3) General Strain Theory (GST). These approaches were used to understand, research, and interpret interlocking pathways to women's involvement in the Criminal Justice System. Several themes emerged in the findings that relate to the previous research including numerous instances of adverse childhood and adulthood experiences such as dysfunctional families, criminal and violent victimization, substance abuse, bullying, low self-esteem, and identity struggles. These themes are discussed as they connect to the women's pathways to involvement in the CJS. The interviewees also faced various collateral consequences from their incarceration including, in-house violence, medical neglect, stigmatization, and exposure to more trauma, which are also connected to the extant criminological literature.

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY INTO THE LIVES OF FORMERLY INCARCERATED
BLACK WOMEN

by

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Okay there was...they do this thing in prison where they are... just.... you can be walking around...and they call you over and they search you. You know? They physically search you! I was experiencing some things and I just didn't understand what it was. I was being triggered... but I just didn't know that I was being triggered. I didn't know what that was about... but I would ... I remember the first time I saw this officer. He called this lady over and ...but there was a man that called her and the way he said her name... "YOU, COME HERE! and "TURN AROUND!" He put her hands up and the way he ran his hands over her body... you know? And there is a part... that they do... that they put the palms of their hands over her body...you know? They go between your breast and up and under your breast and I felt... I guess I felt like I was watching her be raped. You know? I didn't get it... I didn't understand it... All I know was... I ran over to my unit, and I am knocking on my DTS's [Treatment Specialist] door, and I am breathing! And I am having an anxiety attack! And I'm in tears! And I am telling her what I just saw! I am telling her what is going on! We had to come up with a plan. She says, "Well, what are you going to do in the event that you are called over for one of these things?"

The excerpt above describes June's experience in "Los Angeles worst jail ever," known as Twin Towers in 1990. At the time of her arrest, she was a recovering substance abuser, a sexual assault

survivor, and a veteran. In this excerpt, she is referring to an encounter she witnessed between another inmate and a correctional officer (CO) during a random pat-down.

The Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) is an expansive network of people, parties, corporations, and governments that are all invested in one key feature, mass incarceration. Mass incarceration perpetuates violence and harm onto bodies entangled in the criminal justice system (CJS) (Davis 1998). The astronomical rate in which individuals enter and exit the system comes at an immense cost to not only individuals but also to their families and communities. For instance, a prison sentence can expose an individual to a variety of forms of victimization, such as in-house violence, coercion, and medical neglect. Moreover, when released from prison, individuals must also overcome the consequences of their imprisonment, (i.e., unemployment, housing insecurity, addiction, regaining custody, and stigma) (Chesney- Lind and Mauer 2003).

Mass incarceration has also had a significant impact on already marginalized communities who are affected by heightened levels of prison cycling, the loss of working aged adults, and family disruptions (Gray 2018). Furthermore, Angela Davis (1998:1) states that mass incarceration takes away resources from assistance programs such as,

subsize housing for the homeless, [to] ameliorate public education for poor and racially marginalize communities, [to] open free drug rehabilitation programs for people who wish to kick their habits, [to] create a national health care system, [to] expand programs to combat HIV, [to] eradicate domestic abuse- and, in the process, create well-paying jobs for the unemployed.

Structural racism, in conjunction with other factors, has substantially contributed to the vast majority of individuals of color entrapped in the CJS. As maintained by Unnever, Gabbidon, and Chouchy (2019:2),

Within the United States, these conditions are rooted in the historical racial oppression experienced by African Americans, whose contemporary legacy includes concentrated disadvantage in segregated communities, racial socialization by parents, experiences with and perceptions of racial discrimination, and disproportionate involvement in and unjust treatment by the criminal justice system.

Black women have been significantly impacted by mass incarceration. For instance, The Sentencing Project (2019) reported that the imprisonment rate for Black women was (83 per 100,000), which far surpasses the rate of white women (48 per 100,000). However, their experiences have remained almost invisible despite their overrepresentation in the system. Black women are also faced with various stressors that are racialized and gendered, often baked into the very structure of U.S. society. The experience of stress can impact criminal thinking (i.e., a form of maladaptive coping) among women who experience life events that are often distressing and traumatic (Link and Oser 2018). Furthermore, Link and Oser (2018:2) state, “Stressful or traumatic events can vary in intensity and occur in different life domains. They can be emotional or physical, and often require adaption and adjustment on the part of the affected individuals.” For Black women entrapped in the CJS, stressors are often present before their incarceration, such as significant experiences with childhood trauma and abuse, poverty, racial and gender stigmatization, vicarious victimization, single motherhood, and incarcerated loved ones. Indeed, Broidy and Agnew (1997:298) have examined the stressors associated with crime among women through General Strain Theory (GST) and argue that:

First, women’s oppression in various social arenas may play an important role in the generation of strain, and ultimately criminal behavior. In preceding discussions, we argued that the following types of strain may be especially conducive to crime among females: the

failure to achieve financial and interpersonal expectations; the failure to be treated in a just and fair manner by others, including family members, intimate others, and employers; the loss of positive ties with others; a broad range of restrictions on behavior – including restrictions on appearance, conversations, physical and emotional, expression, sexual behavior, travel and social life; the experiences of emotional, physical, sexual abuse; and the role of related strains often associated with “pink collar” jobs and the housewife role. Women, of course, differ in the extent to which they experience these strains, with most being more common among low-income minority women.

This quote raises several important and relevant ideas that are reviewed throughout this study.

One approach to understanding criminal behavior by women is the Gender Pathways perspective (PT) (Kennedy 2018). This approach contextualizes the lives of women and girls engaged in criminal offending through an intersectional lens that includes, race, class, gender, involvement in the CJS, and exposure to victimization (Richie 2012; Potter 2006; Yingling 2016). Pathways toward crime that have emerged in the literature include substance abuse, poverty, homelessness, physical and sexual trauma, mental illness, and difficult relationships, several of which will be explored in the current study. For some, these factors may intervene with one another or work independently.

This study focuses on the before and after experiences of formerly incarcerated Black women as they relate to concepts and ideas in the scholarly literature on crime and criminal justice. Indeed, there are specific challenges that these women face before their incarceration, while incarcerated, and upon their release. To better understand and animate the connections between being a Black woman and experiences with crime and incarceration, semi-structured life history interviews were conducted with six formerly incarcerated women from a Black Feminist

Criminology Perspective (BFC). An assortment of questions was asked about each participant's childhood through adulthood, imprisonment experience(s), and their lives after their release (see Appendix E for the interview sheet). Some of these questions asked participants to talk in-depth about their family and intimate partner relationships, their school experiences, neighborhood demographics, their arrest, and their imprisonment. This methodological approach allowed data to be gathered about three distinct life phases; before incarceration, while incarcerated, and after incarceration. The findings, in Chapters IV and V, reveal interesting connections between the lived experiences of the interviewees and scholarly concepts, ideas, and previously conducted research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Over the last several decades, research on race and mass incarceration has grown exponentially. Respectively, some of these researchers have examined incarcerated women's experiences as well. Several of these studies have employed the following methods, case studies, personal narratives, and life history interviews which have all allowed researchers to dive deeper into the participants attitudes, perceptions, and motivations. (Richie 1996; Johnson and Young 2002; Brunson and Stewart 2012). These qualitative methods have certainly offered an improvement to the literature that unpacks the social circumstances, life events, and relationships connected to an individual's incarceration (Richie 1996: 27). The first part of this chapter will provide a historical context to Black women's experiences in the CJS as this also correlates with their experiences in the welfare system. Subsequently, followed by a review of several empirical studies.

Black Women in the Criminal Justice System and The Welfare System

Carceral experiences for Black women are shaped by their historical and current overrepresentation in prisons and jails in the U.S. Between 1978-1998, incarceration rates for Black women reached explosive highs as crime control strategies focused on pursuing low-level street offenders in low-income neighborhoods. These policies included stop and frisk, no-knock warrants, and militarized drug raids. Moreover, mandatory minimums increased the likelihood that an individual's arrest would result in a prison sentence. These policies have had a huge impact on Black and Latino families as more individuals have entered the CJS now more than ever (Simmons 2017). For example, The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) limited the number of resources available to historically

disadvantaged communities of color. This policy placed limits on who was eligible to receive financial relief from structural poverty (Richie 2018). Policies similar to the passage of the PRWORA have had detrimentally impacted all women of color and have also increased family hardships. Although all women of color can be impacted by these policies, images such as “welfare queen”, or mothers of “crack babies” are race specific and have can have detrimental consequences for Black women seeking assistance procuring adequate healthcare, housing, education, nutrition services, and financial assistance from welfare institutions. Furthermore, in order to receive resources and assistance, women of color must overly prove to state welfare agents that they are worthy recipients of the state’s resources and financial support (Ritchie 2018).

Richie (1996; 2018), Potter (2006), and Roberts (2009) have extensively examined the consequences of welfare withdrawal on Black women who are exposed to intimate partner violence (IPV) and who also involved in the CJS. Richie (2018:113) asserts,

For women with criminal backgrounds, these stereotypes can further impact their ability to receive aid. For example, arrests and convictions can make it so that formerly incarcerated women are considered ineligible by the state to receive aid such as food stamps, housing assistance, childcare, and unemployment. Deprived of assistance, formerly incarcerated women are forced into to enter and remain in violent relationships when they exit the prison. Furthermore, the withdrawal of these resources also exacerbates the stress that comes with the challenges of re-entry.

In the following section, I review some of the most relevant findings from pre-existing studies that have used similar methods comparable to the current research study.

Literature Review: Empirical Studies about Women's Incarceration

Respective contemporary scholars have examined women's experiences in the CJS through case studies, personal narratives, and life history interviews (Pollok 1950; Adler 1975; Collins 1997; Miller 1986; Johnson 2003; Richie 1996; Issac et al. 2001; Johnson and Young 2002). Early research in crime primarily focused on crime committed by young white males. It was not until the work of Pollak (1950), Adler (1975), and Simon (1975) that criminology began including women in the literature. These early studies sparked further interest in the field of crime and deviance. However, they were not without theoretical flaws, which included examining the experiences of women of color involved in crime through an intersectional lens.

In 1997, Catherine Fisher Collins examined the disproportionate number of African American women in prisons in the U.S. Her findings revealed various pathways to crime which included histories of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Moreover, she found that young girls who experienced school failure, truancy, dropping out, unstable home environments, and social isolation were more likely to commit crimes. As the literature expanded, Miller's (1986) study analyzed the social organization of street hustling. She completed topical life history interviews with seventy women in Milwaukee, Michigan who were working in prostitution, fraud, forgery, embezzlement, and larceny. Miller's sample population tended to be younger minority women in poverty, who were arrested for low-level offenses. For several of Miller's participants, becoming a "street woman" meant finding community, often in pseudo families or with the men they became involved with.

Johnson's (2003) *Inner Lives: Voices of African American Women in Prison* is an anthology of interviews conducted with formerly incarcerated women. She asked her

interviewees to reflect on their childhood, their time incarcerated, and experiences post-prison. Johnson's study is unique, in that she also provides commentary from advocacy workers to enhance the data collected. Her interview's revealed similar findings to Collins (1978) study that brought to light the struggle of procuring adequate healthcare behind bars.

Beth Richie (1996) conducted interviews with thirty-seven women on Riker Island to examine the role of gender development and IPV in criminal offending (Richie 1996: 19). Using three subgroups, African American women who were battered, African American women who were not battered, and white women who were battered, Richie examined how intimate partner violence can become a pathway to crime. Her findings offered six pathways associated with crime and CJS involvement: intimate partner violence, women held as hostages, projection and association, sexual exploitation, fighting back, poverty, and addiction. Richie (1996:4) states,

The term gender entrapment appropriates its meaning from the legal notion on who commit crimes. I use gender entrapment to describe the socially constructed process whereby African American women who are vulnerable to men's violence in their intimate relationships are penalized for the behaviors they engage in even when the behaviors are logical extensions of their racialized gender identities, their culturally expected gender roles, and the violence in their intimate relationships."

Gender entrapment immobilizes women in abusive relationships compelling them to commit crimes because they misinterpret their partner's control as affection. Extreme isolation and loyalty to abusive men can lead to imprisonment in many cases. Richie (1996:103) also states that for African American battered women, "a central factor in their gender-entrapment explanation for their participation in illegal activities was the series of shifts in their identities." In the case of African American women who were not battered, she states, "they were not

surprised by their lack of social success when they entered the public sphere." Moreover, Richie also found inconsistencies in the women's educational attainment which later caused the women to experience occupational instability (Richie 1996:104).

In this study, the white battered women seemed to be less burdened by privileged status and loyalties to men, than the African American battered women. Richie also found that the subgroup of white battered women seemed to also believe and feel that they were inferior and subordinate to the people around them. Moreover, the battered white women also seemed to have formed low self-esteem from a very young age (Richie 1996:105). Richie acknowledged three limitations to the method of life histories that she used: ethical and logistical dilemmas, the validity of the information presented, and the generalizability of the research findings (Richie 1996). However, despite these limitations, her study provides an in-depth analysis of women's experiences.

Issacs, Lockhart, and William (2001:103) also examined the experiences of African American women in the CJS and their exposure to prison abuse,

“which is defined as, any forceful or intimidating behavior (e.g., pressure, threats, and/or other actions and communications) that is perpetrated by one or more correctional employees and/ or inmates. Furthermore, this definition includes pushing, shoving, maiming, forceful, rape, murder, or stabbing, etc.”

Their findings reveal that violence behind bars oftentimes goes unreported because individuals fear retribution, in the form of more violence or denied parole. African American women are most vulnerable to in-house violence because they are more likely to be incarcerated for longer periods (Issac, Lockhart, and Williams 2001:147). This finding is consistent with Richie's work (1996).

In a study conducted by Johnson and Young (2002) the impact of addiction, abuse, and family relationships among five incarcerated African American women was examined. The researchers conducted interviews with five women in two medium-security facilities in the Midwest. Their findings revealed that early exposure to alcohol and drugs were associated with a risk of involvement in the CJS. The women's interviews uncovered family histories of addiction and domestic violence. Furthermore, early exposure to trauma and shame were often linked with sexual abuse and substance abuse. Johnson and Young (2002) also found that for most of the women in their study, the women felt their mothers were absent or could not protect them during crucial developmental years.

Researchers such as Leveretz (2010) and Mitchell and Davis (2019) have both examined the links between neighborhood context and reentry. Andrea Leveretz (2010) conducted an ethnographic study that used multiple interviews with female ex-prisoners in Chicago. She examined how women from disadvantaged and racially segregated neighborhoods negotiated the neighborhood in which they lived. She interviewed women involved in drug treatment facilities and self-help programs, which may have influenced their perspectives and the themes found in the study. Leveretz (2010) found three themes present among the women; drugs were non-avoidable, comfort in familiarity, and their past could be used to inspire others from their community. Although many of her participants had little choice in removing themselves from high crime neighborhoods after being released, they adapted into new roles such as "female old heads" or women who avoided street involvement and enforced neighborhood expectations (Leveretz 2010).

In addition, neighborhood context may create additional obstacles for formerly imprisoned Black women who are trying to resume maternal responsibilities. Mitchell and Davis

(2019) conducted five semi-structured interviews in a large urban area of Texas. The sample population included women 18 years or older, who had minor children, and who had been released recently from jail or prison. All the participants were part of a nonprofit organization that helped formerly incarcerated individuals obtain services. Several themes appeared in this study, including safety, education, and housing. Mitchell and Davis (2019) found that one of the challenges that interviewees faced concerned raising and protecting their children. Many of the women interviewed expressed that “In ghettoized communities, poor, Black, single mothers have the additional burden of worrying about the welfare of their children amid drugs and violence.” These mothers often sacrifice and work to protect their children in the absence of larger social support (Mitchell and Davis 2019:99). Housing insecurity also became a prevalent theme in the interviews conducted, especially for women with minor children. The women expressed that they felt inadequate because they could provide a safe home for their children. Furthermore, Mitchell and Davis (2019: 96) contend that,

Motherhood, under the gaze of the state, provides even more complication because women under the surveillance of probation, parole, and child welfare services have to negotiate reentry under the occurrence of multiple demands. Women under state supervision experience social and economic vulnerabilities that place motherhood at high-risk for failure, given the immense obstacles they confront post-incarceration.

Findings in this study revealed the challenges that incarcerated mothers with children face returning home and how mass incarceration and systems of racialized and gendered social control impact Black mothers.

Conceptual Framework

Black Feminist Criminology (BFC) and Intersectionality

Black Feminist Criminology (BFC) uses a multi-theoretical approach to examine the unique experiences of Black women in the criminal justice system. Emerging out of Black Criminology, Critical Race Theory, Black Feminism, and Intersectionality research and scholarship, BFC focuses on gendered and racial pathways to deviance, criminal activity, and incarceration among Black women. As Hillary Potter (2006:111) contends,

BFC extends beyond traditional feminist criminology to view African American women from their multiple marginalized and dominated positions in society. BFC incorporates four interconnected themes of Black Feminism and applies them to the experiences of Black women in the criminal justice system, social structural oppression, the Black community and culture, intimate and familial relations, and the Black woman as an individual.

Intersectionality is rooted in Black Feminism which asserts that there is no singular experience among all women. It considers how socially constructed identities such as race, class, gender, and sexuality interact with an individual's experience. Furthermore, it identifies how power systems affect groups in society while also examining how they might impact individuals. Kimberlee Crenshaw (1989), a Black legal scholar who coined the term "intersectionality," further argues that the experience of being Black and a woman cannot be understood independently from one another. This includes an individual's experience in the CJS. This perspective helps to unpack how individuals and their experiences are situated within systems and institutions as racialized, gendered, and classed subjects (Crenshaw 1989).

All the participants in this study self-identified as Black Women. However, each woman held a multitude of different identities, including mother, felon, bi-racial, LatinX, and queer/gender non-binary. All these identities intersected to influence the women's perception of themselves and their experience. It also impacted how they were perceived in the criminal justice system. The present study used a BFC and an intersectional lens to uncover experiences of gendered racism among the participants. From the findings several themes emerged that exposed instance of gendered and racial forms structural violence among the participants. These themes will be further explored in the Chapter IV, Findings II.

Developmental and Adverse Life Events Theory: Pathways Perspective (PT)

Developmental and Adverse Life Events Theories such as Pathway Perspective (PT), Life- Course Theory (LCT), and Cycle of Violence Theory (CVT), are frequently employed together because of their likenesses and relatedness to experiences of victimization, other life events, and risk factors for involvement in the CJS (Belknap 2020). While these perspectives all have their advantages and disadvantages, for the purpose of this study PT will be used to better understand the experiences of Black women involved in the CJS. For instance, Pathways Perspective (PT) has become a way to understand how internal and external forces create a path for individuals to engage in crime. This approach was not theorized or labeled as a theory/perspective until Daly's (1997) article "Women's Pathways to Felony Court: Feminist Theories of Lawbreaking and Problems of Representation." (Belknap 2020). In the lives of women, this perspective "seeks to uncover and understand specific life events that influence women's future criminal behavior" (Yingling 2016:181). This perspective is also retrospective rather than prospective because researchers typically asks individuals about their past experiences at one point in time, which is how this perspective was employed by the current study. There are

several advantages to using PT, such as adults and adolescents who are reporting on past experiences are more likely to disclose child abuse. There are also several disadvantages to PT, such as collected data cannot be tested for resiliency among nonincarcerated individuals and that people oftentimes have a difficulty remembering and maintaining temporal ordering (Belknap 2020).

Life Course Theory (LCT) is very similar to Pathways Perspective (PT) and Cycle of Violence Theory (CVT). However, both LCT and CVT are prospective perspectives, meaning that there is a focus on future criminal involvement rather than past life events. Thereby, both LCT and CVT were not entirely notable in this current study. PT theorizes that life events, such as trauma, pressures to gendered crime, past abuse in childhood or adulthood, drug use, and male intimate partners are linked to criminal offending among women (Belknap 2007; Yingling 2016). All of which can vary in quality and quantity. Moreover, PT research implies that survival strategies used by girls and women, such as resisting abuse can lead to criminal involvement because these strategies are often criminalized by the state (Belknap 2007; Chesney- Lind & Changnon 2016). This perspective also considers the connection between personal experience i.e., poverty, familial relationships, educational opportunities, and physical and mental health as pathways to criminal involvement, and criminal offending by examining how trauma and abuse are linked to CJS involvement. Exposure to personal victimization was found to be a meaningful factor in involvement crime and the CJS. For instance, girls from abusive homes were found to be at a higher risk of delinquent behavior, substance abuse, truancy, running away, and property crimes (Dehart 2003:23). Furthermore, Dehart (2002) contends that restricted options and negative influences often result in a women's failure to choose socially acceptable pathways.

This study also examined the link between experiences of victimization and criminal offending, looking at how the women contextualize their personal and structural experiences (Dehart 2003).

Throughout this study, several pathways to involvement in the CJS and incarceration were revealed in the participants biographies and the findings. Several of these pathways appeared to have similarities within PT such as, adverse childhood experiences, victimization, addictions, and Intimate partner violence (Yingling 2016).

General Strain Theory (GST)

Agnew (1992) proposed General Strain Theory (GST) which focused on three sources of strain, (1) the presence of negative stimuli, (2) the loss of positive stimuli, and (3) the failure to achieve positive goals. GST argues that responses to strain are often dependent on an individual's personality, self-esteem, and social support systems. For example, anger in response to strain is argued to regularly lead to delinquent coping mechanisms (Agnew 1992; Belknap 2020). To expound on GST, Broidy (2001) addressed the importance of examining varied goals to individuals' gender, race, and class differences. Findings reported that strain caused anger in both boys and girls, however, girls were more likely to report emotions such (e.g., guilt, worthlessness, disappointment, depression, worry, fear, and insecurity). Additionally, Broidy and Agnew (1997) argue that gender gaps in offending are likely to be a result of gender differences in types of strains and their emotional responses (Belknap 2020).

Agnew (2001) pointed out that characteristic of strain such as the severity, the belief of unjustness, persistence, and the importance of the strain in an individual's life should also be examined. All these factors can increase the likelihood that strain will result in anger, followed by criminal behavior. Furthermore, Agnew (2001; 2002) also recognized that abuse and criminal

victimization in particular can be viewed as unjust and serious by victims, which can result in stronger feelings of anger and injustice than most other strains (Belknap 2020).

In GST studies, gender is often used as a control variable rather than to understand how strains are experienced by women and girls. Furthermore, strain such as abuse, and trauma are often left out of strain analyses despite the salience of these experiences in incarcerated women's life histories (Richie 1996; Potter 2006; and Belknap 2020). For instance, Broidy and Agnew (1997) state that girls often report having more restrictions more caretaking expectations in their lives than boys. Girls were also more likely to report emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Adolescence girls were also more likely to express feeling stressed because of the close relationships with family and friends. Agnew and Broidy (1997) argued that women tend to cope with strain through self-directed or self-destructive deviant acts, eating disorders, and substance abuse. Furthermore, women involved in social support networks (i.e., religious networks) are more likely to employ legitimate coping strategies to strain.

General Strain Theory can be applied to all racial and ethnic groups. However, African Americans may experience different strain levels because of racism, economic disadvantages, criminal victimization, and poor health (Jang 2007: 3). African American women are also exposed to different strains than African American men. Agnew and Broidy (1997) suggest that strain might be experienced by African American women in areas of economic concerns, household maintenance, and parenting. It can also be linked to, race/ ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, motherhood, and disciplinary history. Moreover, strain might also be linked to experiences of personal trauma and abuse, intimate partner violence, childhood trauma, and vicarious victimization adaptations of strain (Link and Oser 2018). Jang (2007:8) found that African American women were more likely than men to report experiencing strain related to

physical health, interpersonal relations, and gender roles. However, African American women were more likely to report experiencing financial strain in comparison to their racial counterparts. In the current study, GST strain is applied to the experiences of formerly incarcerated Black women to draw attention to the different strains associated with this population's participation in crime and deviance. The study also analyzes coping strategies that each participant employed in response to the stress of personal and structural circumstances and incarceration.

It must also be acknowledged that the current American legal system is embedded with racial and ethnic undertones. Minorities are more likely to encounter the criminal justice system, receive surveillance, and become incarcerated (Piquero and Sealock 2010). For example, police officers are more likely to arrest young Black males in lower-income communities. Individuals from these communities are also more likely to receive harsher sentences when convicted (Siegal 2011). This study also allowed for the possibility women in the study were hyper exposed to CJS surveillance inside and outside of their communities. For example, interview questions asked participant about their neighborhood community, experiences, and perceptions with law enforcement and the legal system to determine whether they perceived their race and gender to have played a significant role in their incarceration and treatment. The subsequent chapter includes the research design, the procedures for data collections which were all guided by the methods used in the previous literature and theoretical frameworks explored above.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Study Design

The study was designed to examine the experiences of formerly incarcerated Black women through an exploratory research method which allowed the project to be open to the interviewee's motivations and experiences. It also allowed the women to feel as comfortable as possible sharing some of their most painful experiences with trauma and victimization (Potter 2008:14). Qualitative research is often used by feminist scholars and scholars of color, who view the research setting as an opportunity to learn from informants. As Hillary Potter (2008:15) contends in a similar study, "Exploratory and qualitative methods of inquiry into social life does not require that one begin with a theory or premise before entering the field to conduct research."

Although qualitative research methods provide for a deeper understanding of interviewees life experiences, there are a few limitations. For instance, there is no way to be sure if individuals are remembering events correctly as memories can be complicated by experiences of trauma. Interviewee's might have also withheld information to protect themselves and others. Another limitation to qualitative research is social desirability bias. For example, interviewees might have had the tendency to respond to interview questions in a manner that would be favorably to others and or the interviewer. This could also cause interviewees to leave out certain information to protect themselves. In similar studies, interviewers have made every effort to remain as objective as possible. However, as Leavy (2014:299) indicates,

as scholars, we realize that there is no alternative but to turn life into language. But there is more than one way to do this. Traditional social science writing favors the types of events and "data" that are amenable to conceptual analysis and theoretical explanation.

Ambiguous, vague, and contingent experiences that cannot so easily be covered by concepts or organized into a coherent system of thought are bypassed in favor.

In the process of turning personal narratives into language, it is almost impossible for researchers to withhold their own understanding of the literature and themes. For instance, interviewers might ask specific follow up questions based on their understandings on a topic. Furthermore, an interviewer might also give direct and indirect cues in agreement with an interviewee's response. This can ultimately effect data collection when qualitative methods of research are employed. Despite, the limitations listed above, a qualitative research design provided to be more valuable in understanding the women's behaviors and emotions which would have been difficult to uncover through quantitative methods.

Although complete life-history interviews were not gathered, the decision to conduct topical interviews ensured that participants had enough time to share and that research questions could be addressed. Generally, qualitative research uses a smaller population sample to deal with the limited amount of time needed to transcribe and code the collected data. The decision to interview five to seven women allowed time to be taken with each participant and for a deeper dive into their personal experiences. Semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix E) were developed from the pre-existing literature reviewed earlier and to address the research questions stated below. The interview questions were categorized as either a questions about a childhood experience, a pre-incarceration adult experience, an incarceration experience, and as a post-incarceration experience. These interviews were all categorized in accordance with the research questions. For instance, research question (1) which asked, what personal life events, social circumstance and relationships do formerly incarcerated Black women accept as having an impact on their participation and or incarceration, was associated with the following interview

topics, family, school experiences, neighborhood context, relationships, and employment. This was followed by research question (2) which asked, how do formerly incarcerated Black women understand and conceptualize forms of personal and structural victimization, The interview questions that were associated with this research questions examined experiences of gendered racism. For example, research participants were asked “Do you think certain stressors are associated with being African American/ Black? Have these experiences impacted you or the people around you? Do you think that played a significant role in your experiences?” Lastly, research question (3) asked, how did incarceration impact interviewee’s future victimization, rehabilitation, and or involvement in subsequent crime. For this research questions, interview questions asked the participants about their experiences while incarcerated and their current life post incarceration, including their housing situation, experiences on parole, substance abuse recovery, finding employment, and the trials of mending relationships. Overall, the interview questions were designed to pick up on strain, gendered pathways to involvement in the CJS, and gendered racism among the six participants. For a complete overview of the interview script refer to (Appendix E).

Recruiting Interviewees and Interview Protocol

After carefully reviewing the current literature on Black women’s pathways to incarceration, purposive sampling was used to recruit formerly incarcerated women eligible to participate in this study. While many of the pre-existing studies, recruited from within correctional facilities, the purpose of this study was also to examine the collateral consequences of imprisonment. A participant’s eligibility required the following; at least 18 years of age, identified as a Black/ African American woman, and had served at least 30 days in a correctional facility across the United States. A 30-day time frame was selected to ensure that participants felt

they had enough experiences about their imprisonment to share and in light of potential difficulties finding individuals with incarceration experiences. There were no geographical restrictions placed on this study as there was the option for participants to interview through the phone. This allowed for a more diverse population sample. While most women were local to North Carolina, one participant resided in California. These recruitment procedures were selected based on existing literature and research carried out with this population as highlighted in Chapter II. They also helped to minimize difficulty in recruiting individuals from this population due to prospective privacy risk and the impact of Covid-19. Furthermore, these recruitment strategies were implemented after IRB approval and guidance.

As stated, at the recruitment meeting potential participants were given general information about the study and were asked to provide “initial verbal consent” which established that they were indeed interested in participating in the current study and that they would like to schedule an official interview. The study fact sheet (see appendix A) provided by the IRB served a way to ensure that potential participants were aware of the potential risk associated with the study. It also served as way for participants to provide consent without having to physically provide a signature. This allowed the participants to remain anonymous.

At the official interview, participants were asked if they had time to review the study fact sheet. They were then asked if they were willing to provide “official verbal consent” meaning that they were fine with being interviewed on that day and that they were comfortable being recorded for transcription purposes. The recruitment process described above, yielded six participants that had varying involvement in the CJS system and varying criminal records. For more detailed information about the participants backgrounds refer to the Chapter IV.

The initial interview process began with the recruitment of individuals through emailing a variety of different organization which included, advocacy programs, rehabilitation centers, transitional housing programs, and reentry programs across the country to ask if they would be willing to pass along flyers. Moreover, recruitment flyers were also approved to be posted on social media websites such as Instagram and Facebook. Participants were also recruited through snowball sampling such as word of mouth. For instance, half of the participants were recruited through personal connections. Additionally, at the end of the interview participants were asked if they would be willing to share flyers with others. This method, however, did not yield any of the six participants. The recruitment flyers included general information about the study and the researcher contact information (refer to Appendix B and C).

Potential participants were asked to contact the interviewer directly if they were interested in learning more about the study. At the initial recruitment meeting (they received a copy of the study fact sheet and were asked general demographic questions to better assess if they would be appropriate for the study (see Appendix A). If the participant met the following requirement (1) 18 years of age, (2) identified as Black/ African American, (3) identified as female, (4) had a history of incarceration and was not currently incarcerated, and (5) gave initial consent, an official interview was scheduled. Many of the participants chose to conduct this interview over the phone. Only one local participant decided to participate in an in-person interview. At the scheduled official interview, participants were asked to a second time to provide verbal consent. During the interview, multiple breaks were allotted, and in most cases, the interviews lasted between two and four hours. While some of the interviews were conducted in this general format, many participants provided a biographical account of their life beginning with their childhood. The participants seemed to be more comfortable with the fluidity of the

semi-structured interview style than an interview structure that did not allow for some participant led discussions. For example, throughout the interviews, there was a great deal of voluntary storytelling that did not need prompting from the interviewer as well as several of the participants were open to disclosing traumatic life events without prompting. This indicated that there was a comfortability among the participants interviewed.

In qualitative research, interviewers might find it necessary to probe participants for more information on a particular topic or for clarification on a response to an interview question. In the current study, whether probing techniques were needed for participants varied and were dependent on whether the participant was older, had worked in the mental health field and with incarcerated individuals in advocacy work, and if they had prior experiences sharing their story. These individuals seemed more inclined to voluntarily disclose their stories and even traumatic experiences from their past. Most of the participants shared that they were motivated to participant in the study to bring awareness to trauma, abuse, and injustices in policing and the CJS. Some of the women hoped their stories would also resonate with someone in a similar situation and motivate the person to make better choices, heal from trauma, and even leave toxic relationships. While probing techniques were seldom used and needed throughout the study, it should be mentioned that caution was taken when interviewees were asked about traumatic experiences such childhood stressors, intimate partner violence (IPV), and in-house violence, which meant that probing about these experiences happened very rarely in an effort to respect the participant's privacy. Overall, despite the caution that was taken, the women regularly self-disclosed experiences of trauma and abuse.

Some participants asked to be interviewed over multiple days, allowing for the space to decompress and reflect. It also allowed time to address follow-up questions or any missed

information at the next meeting. A trauma-informed approach was also implemented to ensure that participants were treated with compassion, understanding, and validation as re-living traumatic events from one's past can be triggering (Richie 1996: 17). At the end of each interview, participants were offered a contact list of local organizations to reach out to in the community for free counseling and resources. Participants were also given a fifty-dollar gift card as an incentive to share their story. It was also a way to thank the women for their time and energy.

After the interview process, transcriptions were created and evaluated to find similarities or patterns among the participant's life experiences, pathways, and coping choices. The interpretations of the data were influenced by the previous literature and what was missing from that literature.

Confidentiality

Several research protocols were set in place to protect the participant's confidentiality. When initial flyers were distributed, participants were asked to contact the researcher through a created nonpersonal google email address and phone number provided on the flyer. They were also asked to respond with either a "yes" or a "no" text message or email and not disclose any personal information. Once received, the participant was contacted through a phone call, and an initial interview was scheduled. Participants were not recruited or eligible to participate in the current study if they were currently involved in an ongoing criminal case to protect their legal case as well as to abide by IRB regulations.

At the initial interview, participants were asked if they would like to be provided with an alias or if they would like to choose a name to be referred to as. Participants were also made

aware that any identifiable factors such as specific streets, characters, attended schools, and organizations they were involved with would not be transcribed in the official report. Furthermore, during the interview process, participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time, and all their information, including contact info, recordings, and transcriptions, would be removed from the study, which none of the participants chose to do. Participants were also made aware that they could ask the recorder to be turned off at any moment. The data collected was only recorded on a device that was password protected and kept in a safe and secure location while not in use. The researcher was the only individual who had access to the recordings. In addition, upon request, interviewees had the opportunity to review the transcriptions of their stories to make sure that the information collected was an accurate portrayal of their experiences. Any information that participants did not want to be shared was immediately taken out of the transcription and was not used in the study. There was no request by any of the participants to review their transcriptions.

Coding

The data for this study was divided into demographic and narrative interview question responses. The information was then further divided to determine the life stage that participants were speaking about based on their responses. After the interviews and several re-reads of the transcriptions, coding was conducted to review the data to find similarities and patterns between the data and literature and within the interview population. A response table was created based on the interview questions and their responses to better examine any differences and similarities. At this time, codes were assigned to the raw data, which included the responses to the interview

questions to discover any reoccurrences and new themes (Strauss & Corbin 1998). This stage sorted information into various categories depending on the importance, patterns, and further information as there were connections to the literature and as new information came to light. Selective coding, which included a more narrowly focused set of themes and patterns were then compared to the pre-existing literature to construct a more formalized analysis.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS, PART I

I am very grateful to the six brave women that shared their personal experiences for this project. Each participant was asked to narrate their life experiences from adolescence to adulthood and share how these experiences were connected to their involvement in the CJS. I have been told stories from women that had served time for identity theft, tax fraud, a conspiracy of human trafficking, occupying a dwelling, drug possession, marijuana possession, probation violation, and armed robbery with the intent to cause bodily harm—the women’s stories varied by different socioeconomic, regional, and familial backgrounds. While several of the women, did have previous charges that were revealed throughout their interviews, these charges were not exactly focused on in the current study. Although, several of these charges are mentioned in the biographies provided below for reference.

Despite having different backgrounds, many of the women shared similar experiences. These biographical stories are shared first to allow readers to understand the deeper personal and social histories of the interviewees. I then provide the main findings of this research in Chapter V, where I weave findings and concepts from the previously reviewed literature with my results. For an overview of the self-disclosed demographic make-up of the participants, including race, age, the crime for which they were convicted of, time spent incarcerated, and more, please refer to the chart below.

Table 1: Self Disclosed Make-Up of Participants

	Age	Home State/ Current Residency	Occupation	Highest Level of Education	**Conviction(s)	Type of Facility/ Time Incarcerated	*CJS Involvement
Autumn	41	North Carolina	Bathroom Attendant/	11 th Grade	Probation Violation/ Possession of Marijuana	State Prison/ 1 year and 90 days.	Medium Involvement
Chaplain Jack	58	California	Minster/ Health Navigator	Graduate School/	Armed Robbery with intent to cause bodily harm	State Prison/8 years	High Involvement
Michelle	26	North Carolina	Delivery Driver	11 th Grade	Conspiracy to Commit Human Trafficking	Federal/2 ½ years	High Involvement
Rebecca	52	North Carolina	Factory Work	12 th Grade	Occupying a dwelling and Drug Possession	Jail/ 30 Days	Low Involvement
May	46	North Carolina	Podcaster/ Business Owner	High School/ Some College	Conspiracy to commit Tax Fraud	Federal/ 10 ½ months	Low Involvement
June	57	Illinois/North Carolina	Addiction Counselor/ Peer Advocate	College	Federal/Identity Theft	10 Months	High Involvement

* The table above describes each participant’s involvement in the Criminal Justice System. Low involvement applied to participants who said that this was their first arrest. Medium involvement categorized participants who had between 2 and 3 arrest and or conviction. High Involvement referred to participants who had extensive histories of contact with the CJS.

** The category for Convictions is not comprehensive of all the times the women were arrested and or incarcerated. This category depicts the women’s most recent arrest and/or conviction and how they responded to the interview questions (see Appendix E). Some of the participants’ biographies in Chapter 4 reveal a more descriptive depiction of the involvement in the CJS

Biographic Narratives of Participants

Autumn

I was mad at myself. I was like, you done got arrested. Now, you must go through this with the court system. So, I mean, y'all got me all messed up, and my record all messed up behind some marijuana. But I was mad at myself because like I said, I was trying to survive, trying to take care of my kids. They put you through so much trying to get assistance and help.

Autumn is a forty-year-old woman from a rural county in North Carolina. Over the course of her 20s and 30's she was arrested several times for minor offenses which included probation violations, speeding tickets, and failed drug tests. She explained that the last time she was arrested was for possession of marijuana and failing to make payments while on parole. The possession charge landed her one year in a state facility and the second charge landed her another 90 days.

I interviewed Autumn in a local park. She was the only interviewee I was able to speak with in person. She currently works as a cleaning attendant and babysits sometimes. Autumn is also constantly stressed. She shared that it has been challenging to find employment because she has a felony, even though it occurred several years ago, and she hasn't since been arrested. She also empathizes with individuals who eventually return to prison because of her own challenges. Autumn was homeless for a year after being released from prison. She stayed in local parks instead of shelters because of overcrowding. Unfortunately, she didn't have the opportunity to participate in a second chance program after prison. She expressed feeling frustrated with the

number of prisons being built instead of schools and second-chance programs. She said that some of these programs just weren't equipped to help individuals find long-term employment.

Autumn and I spoke about her childhood which became difficult after her parents' divorce. She described it as "rocky" because she and her brother were pushed between different relatives' care where they experienced mistreatment. Autumn's mother battled with severe mental health issues for most of her life, and her father at the time struggled with addiction, but is now clean. She also revealed that she was raped by her mother's boyfriend, which caused her mother to lose custody of her and her brother. While she didn't speak in detail about the situation, she voiced feeling frustrated with how her mother handled the situation. Although she doesn't blame her mother for failing to protect her, their relationship continues to be strained even into adulthood.

Though Autumn had a difficult childhood, she participated in Girl Scouts, ran track, played piano, and even partook in cotillions. When she and her brother went to stay with an aunt that was a storyteller, they traveled to places like Alaska and Chicago. She said, "it was like, you know, I had the poor life, and I had the rich life because I had a tutor." When asked about her childhood neighborhood, Autumn said that even though it had been high in crime, it was primarily monitored through community supervision as everybody knew everybody.

In the ninth grade, Autumn became pregnant with her first son. At the time, "I was looking for. I was looking for somebody to actually love me and show me love and not keep bouncing around and around." The man at the time was way older than her and married. Autumn shared that she enjoyed school. She mainly found herself hanging out with both the "nerdy crowd" and the "bad kids." However, her life got complicated again when she moved back in with her mother. Her mother, like her father, also suffered from addiction. She recalled a time as a teenager, when she

had to pawn off some of their belongings to purchase food from the grocery store. She was taking care of both her brother and young son at the time. After running away multiple times, she, her son, and brother were placed in foster care until she reached sixteen. They spent a total of about ninety days in care.

After a short break, Autumn and I talked about her involvement in the criminal justice system. When I asked her, what experiences contributed to her incarceration, she shared, “I think if I would have had a better childhood. If I hadn’t been pushed around from family member to family member.” She even expressed feeling frustrated with herself after being arrested even though she was trying to survive. She said that there are too many hoops to go through to get help before you end up getting arrested. Autumn didn’t feel that she was arrested because of her race. However, it is complicated. She said that she sometimes felt police officers messed with the wrong people and that it wasn’t fair that she was given a felony sentence for a minor violation. She voiced, “I’m not going to say I was the perfect person, but fights... little tickets aren’t nothing major. Everybody gets tickets here and there.” While incarcerated, Autumn’s mother took care of her three boys, creating unnecessary stress. She feared her mother would tell her sons that she was in jail and not just away. In reflecting on her time in prison, she disclosed that she beats herself up for going to jail because she missed her youngest son’s first steps. Her youngest son, now fifteen, has also had various run-in with the criminal justice system. She feels that he acts out because she wasn’t there for him early in adolescence. Autumn indicated that she never got adjusted to prison conditions between the rude correctional officers and the random shakedowns. She remembered the food being awful and avoiding the juice because it would cause yeast infection and severe constipation. I asked Autumn if she had participated in any programs and had been assigned a job. She indicated that she was involved in a mother-read

program that allowed her to record bedtime stories to her sons and receive her GED. She was also required to attend parenting and budgeting classes, which she felt were most beneficial when she was released. She never developed coping strategies while incarcerated but conveyed that she just put it in her mind never to return.

Autumn suffered several collateral consequences from her imprisonment. When she was released, she found herself homeless for a year and seven months and unable to receive public housing and assistance because of her drug charges. I asked her if she had changed since being incarcerated. She looked across the street to point out an officer patrolling the parking area. Then said, “You know he is supposedly sitting there for our protection... ain’t nothing gonna happen in the daylight. They just do stuff. The mess with the wrong people.” Autumn has not been incarcerated since this experience. She speaks about wanting to open a safe place for women that are victims of abuse and trauma. A place where people who want the help can get the help they need getting back on their feet.

Chaplain Jack

So instead of a person who is incarcerated trying to have a conversation with the victim of the crime, the real victim is the person that commits the crime. So, that conversation needs to start with the self and to restore yourself and reconcile and to become who it is that God created you to be. You know? Getting to know who keeps you. Yes, you survived but there is power greater than yourself that keeps you and despite all the things that you do, and to know who you are, you must know that entity

Chaplain Jack's story was vastly different from the other women I interviewed. In 1995, she was convicted of armed robbery with the intent to cause bodily harm and served eight years in a state correctional facility. She is now fifty-eight and works as a health navigator for marginalized communities. She is also a minister and uses her past battles with substance abuse to help others.

Her story begins in Oakland, California, where she lived with her mother, father, and grandparents. She described her family as upper-middle-class, which differed from the other women I interviewed. Her father worked as a professor and her mother as a telephone operator. I asked Chaplain Jack to tell me about her parents and childhood memories. She explained that her father was a roaring alcoholic who was very volatile at times and 'skated' around on her mother. Her mother was always on the receiving end of her father's verbal abuse after he returned home from drinking and gambling. She voiced,

I grew up in an alcoholic home with many expectations about what I was supposed to be... they were pouring into me because they had a plan for me to do better and be better than they were or to have more than them.

Chaplain Jack didn't quite get along with other kids throughout her childhood, especially the kids in her neighborhood. She preferred to hang out with older adults because she felt mature for her age, even though she secretly wanted to fit in with the other kids. Growing up, her parents, for the most part, kept her sheltered, set very high expectations, and poured into her education. Chaplain Jack explained, "it was not that I sought out being in trouble. It was just that it seemed that people that got in trouble and didn't have a lot were more interesting." I then asked her to share a not-so-positive memory from her childhood in which she shared that she had been molested between the ages of 7-14.

Chaplain Jack attended a very “ritzy” private elementary school. She had very fond memories of visiting the planetarium and other school field trips. In describing some of these experiences, she said that many of the white teachers she felt doted on her because they were so fascinated that she was an intelligent Black child. While she recognized that she was different from the people she attended school with, it wasn’t until she had a teacher refer to Black people as “wild animals” that she no longer felt comfortable and safe in her environment. However, she later explained that as a teenager, she hung out with, as she called them, “the wild white kids” throughout high school. I was curious to find out why she felt more connected to her white peers at this time. She stated, “It was what I knew. I had had so many bad experiences around Black kids from my neighborhood growing up and stuff that I thought they were all the same.” Chaplain Jack also described herself as a tomboy and vastly different from her black female counterparts. She preferred to hang out with the boys drinking and getting high as a teenager. Eventually, she started to show up to class intoxicated every day.

After graduating high school, she enrolled in a community college, and things started to spiral out of control. Shortly after visiting a cousin, she became pregnant with her son. At the time, even though she knew she liked women, she also had a very juvenile understanding of her own identity. However, through mentorship, she was able to find herself genuinely. She explained that she had all the intentions of being the perfect mother with her son. Her son lived with her for a while until her parents took over custody. She would sometimes pick him up on weekends for visits. In describing this period of her life, Chaplain Jack contended that she held onto all the ethics and morals that her parents had instilled in her as a child: always tell the truth, always try to be good, and be mindful of the people around you. Many of these beliefs are what kept her at times from going “full-throttle ugly,” although she was still heavy in her addiction

and pursuit of living a “poor lifestyle.” It wasn’t until her grandmother passed that she “dedicated her life to becoming a full-time drug addict.”

Chaplain Jack was arrested for armed robbery. At the time, she was involved in a relationship with another woman who struggled with substance abuse. That woman eventually turned her in. Chaplain Jack spoke to me about her experiences in prison. She said that her gender fluidity played a significant role in how other inmates and correctional staff viewed her. It was assumed that women who enter prison get “turned out.” Meaning, that they enter prison identifying as heterosexual but then are sexually coerced through sexual victimization into performing a homosexual role. For Chaplain Jack, entering prison gay and male-oriented allowed her to avoid insidious advances from correctional staff. She stated, “Well, you know it is just a different experience. If you are male-oriented in there versus if I had gone in there, knowing who I already am.” Although she had to complete a couple of write-ups on correctional staff, she mentioned that she was respected because she was calm and didn’t cause problems.

In prison, Chaplain Jack worked as a cook until she was reclassified as a welder for the remaining five years. She made only 32 cents an hour. She expressed her frustration with the certification program because she still found it challenging to find a job when she got out because of her record. When she was offered a post-prison position as a welder, she was paid significantly lower than she expected for her expertise. I asked Chaplain Jack how prison changed her. She said that her incarceration saved her life from substance abuse. In many ways, it has helped her become the individual that she is today who is strong, a protector, and not afraid of anything. However, she has also suffered several collateral consequences including spending time away from her son. She also explained that she has a difficult time relaxing and that she always feels the need to put her guard up

Michelle

Ummm... it's a lot. First, it's embarrassing to tell anybody that I am a registered sex offender because the first thought that pops up in anybody's head is... "Oh, who did you touch, or what did you do?" It is never, "Oh you didn't know the girl was underage...oh you just so happened to get put in a situation." No it's always..." Oh, you're a pedophile... oh you nasty." You put in a category and it's like that category is like... it determines a lot.

Michelle was the youngest participant interviewed. At the time, she was twenty- six years old and is the only Afro-Latina woman interviewed. Her mother is African American, and her father is Puerto Rican. When Michelle was twenty-one years old, she was arrested in a conspiracy to commit human trafficking after her ex-boyfriend left her in a hotel room with a girl that turned out to be underage. At the time, her ex-boyfriend had a warrant out for his arrest. While she was offered a shorter sentence if she provided information about her ex-boyfriend, she chose not to out of loyalty. She said, "LOYALTY, ...that's something about Leos! Very loyal! I was not about to tell on that man because of course he is my baby daddy. So, I ended up going to jail that night." She was eventually sentenced to twenty-eight months in a federal facility but only served twenty-three. Michelle suffered several collateral consequences as a result of incarceration. She has had to register as a sex offender which has made it difficult for her to find housing, obtain employment, and regain custody of her two children.

When I asked Michelle about her childhood, she exclaimed that while she looked forward to holidays, her family struggled for the most part. Michelle has lived in North Carolina for most of her life. While many of the participants that I interviewed lived in rural counties in North

Carolina, she grew up in an urban area. I asked Michelle to share some of her childhood experiences. She immediately began by talking about her relationship with her mother who suffered from several health problems which kept her from keeping a job. She described her father as a hard worker but a drug dealer and involved in a gang. Michelle's life drastically changed when her parents separated, and her father moved to a different state. At twelve years old, she became responsible for taking care of her two siblings. She expressed,

I was twelve and I was taking care of an eight-year-old and a six-year-old. So, I felt I was wronged. I would skip school and everything because I was taking care of my siblings and I didn't really have time to focus on myself.

After the divorce, Michelle's mother became very closed off and suffered from a severe form of depression which caused them to clash at times. She said, "Yeah it was a hateful relationship between me and her growing up because like of course...I took a lot of resentment on her for not being there." She also shared that she felt that her mother didn't care about her because she would allow her to do whatever she wanted which included, smoking weed, having sex, coming home late, and skipping school. Michelle also disclosed that she had been molested by a family member at a young age.

After her parent's separation, they were evicted and had to move into a shelter. She said, "It was weird. Like I wasn't really... I was light skin, so a lot of the kids at the shelter judged me." After leaving the shelter, they moved to the projects. Michelle said that living in the projects went from "scary to just normal.

I asked her to explain. She mentioned that police were always around because of the drug dealers and shootouts. For the most part, she kept to her own, even though she got into fights because she was picked on. At fifteen, Michelle had her first daughter. In speaking about the experience,

she said, “You would think that it would have been scary, but it really wasn’t because I was already used to taking care of my brother and sister. I felt like I was already grown. I really wasn’t.” By her junior year, Michelle dropped out of school to work and provide for her daughter.

Michelle’s story with the criminal justice system begins when she was a teenager. Her mother enrolled her into as she refers to as a “fake scared straight program” for her involvement in fighting, damaging property, running, and smoking weed. I asked her if she felt that she benefited from the program. She said that it was more annoying than anything. She noticed that most of the teenagers enrolled like her hadn’t committed any serious crimes and needed counseling rather than a detention center. After taking a short break, Michelle spoke with me about her incarceration which she attributed to not trusting her instincts and ignoring red flags. At the time, she had been so busy trying to maintain her relationship with her ex-boyfriend to keep their family together that she had been brainwashed into thinking that prostitution could be a way to support her family. Michelle said,

After I lost my first job, I started selling weed. It went from me just selling weed and I’m already “fast” to like I’m already having sex for free. So now, I’m just a prostitute and get paid to have sex.

When SWAT arrived at the hotel, they arrested Michelle. She spent a total of three months in jail. Eventually, she had no choice but to bail herself out when she received a phone call that her ex-boyfriend was apprehended, and her daughters were taken into foster care. While out on bail, Michelle started working on a plan to open a restaurant and regain custody of her daughters until the federal government decided to take on her case, which meant she would have to appear for a different trial. She eventually turned herself in as a co-defendant. Michelle ended up spending

another nine months in jail awaiting a court date. She had only \$2500 for the commissary. She had thought she would be able to return home to her daughters after six months. She had this to say, “I didn’t know nothing. I didn’t know what was going to happen. I done spent all my commissary money.” After months of trying to contact her lawyer, Michelle’s court date arrived. The judge that preceded her case recommended she serve forty-three out of the 120 months she was supposed to serve.

Michelle was first transported to a federal holding center. She described it as more like jail. She also spoke about Con- Air, a federal plane that flies inmates to different states to be processed. She talked about how uncomfortable it was to be on a plane with “lusting, dirty perverted men.” She said, “Probably like a good half of the men were sex offenders. And these were people that had touched girls and did something to kids.” After she was transported to prison, she also had a hard time getting adjusted. First, she explained that all the officers she perceived to be racist. She said,

I mean it’s not really...they didn’t never come off on me of course. I’m light skin. Like if I was dark skin like maybe. I just watched how they treated other Black people and like they would talk to them rude and ruthless.

I wanted to know if Michelle had experienced any form of medical neglect while in prison. She said she experienced extremely long wait times for appointments to see doctors, and it would take up to five days if it were a severe medical situation and sixty days if it was not an emergency. I also asked Michelle if there had been any coping mechanism she adopted in prison. She mentioned that she had always been very artistic. In prison, she started making cards to sell to other inmates. She also worked as an orderly in the library, making only 12 cents an hour.

After her release, Michelle stayed in a temporary halfway house. For her, it was beneficial because she lacked familial support when she returned home. The halfway house allowed her to save money, a place to stay, and employment. Michelle's daughters were placed in state custody when she was arrested. She explained that it has been challenging to get them back, and she regrets the time she has lost with them while in prison. She clarified that as a registered sex offender, the judge has hesitated to grant her custody of her daughters because she could not take them to school or even on a playground. As a registered sex offender, she can't be within 1000ft of a childcare facility. Michelle also expressed feeling stigmatized. She explained that she has been unable to find a decent job and housing because once people realize she was arrested on human trafficking charges, she is immediately turned away. At the end of our time together, Michelle told me that she wants a better life for her daughters than she had growing up. She has been working hard to be a positive role model for them.

May

And I don't care what anybody says or what anybody did because unless you are just an evil person that needs to be separated from society... there were times when somebody could have intervened soon enough. Right? That's all that prison tells you. By the time somebody ends up with a prison sentence that means that there were some red flags that people ignored. Some small act of indifference. That's not my business... that's not my business, and before you know it people are saying well, I thought something wasn't right. But they didn't stop and say anything. So, I am never happy to hear of someone going to prison because isolation is abuse itself. And it doesn't make you better. It's not rehabilitation. It makes you worse. It brings out the savage in

you because dehumanization you forget what being a human... you don't have human contact.

You don't have loving nurturing human contact which helps you develop and grow.

May is a forty-six-year-old woman from a rural town in North Carolina. She was the only participant that committed an occupational crime and was convicted of conspiracy to commit tax fraud. She spent a total of 10 ½ months in a federal work prison. After she opened a tax office with a business partner, she found out that she was set up to take the fall for a tax fraud scheme, despite having been in the hospital for months battling cancer. She explained that her business partner hired other employees while she was out. He taught them how to falsify taxes while she recovered. In the past, it had been May's job to train employees and when the IRS issued a warrant out for her arrest, she realized that her business partner had already made a deal with the IRS to turn her in. She was charged with a total of fourteen violations and ended up having to take a plea while everyone else served only a couple of months. This was the first time May had ever been arrested or convicted of any crime.

May and I talked about her hometown and childhood. She told me that it was traditional for students to drop out of school at sixteen to work at the local factory. In her hometown, it was very difficult to find employment if you were not white or light-skin, especially an office job. She described her hometown as having "subtle low-key racism" which meant that "while nobody said that as a Black person you couldn't apply for a certain job it was just an understood."

May's family was very "southern traditional." Her mother married her father at the age of eighteen and had her first child at sixteen. In school, May participated in student council, always made A's, and had been very athletic even though her father didn't allow any of his daughters to play sports. She described her father as very verbally and emotionally abusive towards her mother. Her mother didn't work and when she did, he insisted she quit. She had this

say about her father, “See I didn’t realize it. I didn’t know. I was a kid. But because where we were, all the men were chauvinist, and all the men were mean.” Like Autumn and Michelle, May’s relationship with her mother was, “regrettably strained.” As a teenager, her father had poisoned her mind against her mother by repetitively talking negatively about her. When her parent’s separated and he left, her father made it seem as though her mother had caused him to leave. May admitted that her mother in truth had suffered from depression. She explained, “She never had a car and anywhere we went, if my dad wasn’t home, she would walk us there. We thought we were spending family time together. Turns out that is poverty.” Looking back, May now believes that her mother had also battled with alcoholism and a drug addiction.

Growing up, May said her family was “Black middle class” because they were never on welfare and had a two bedroom home. Back then, it had been harder to tell because it seemed as though there wasn’t much class distinction. Later, she and her family moved into income-based housing and started receiving food stamps. She lost connection with many of her childhood friends and family. While she loved school, however when her father divorced her mother, her grades started to slip. They were eventually evicted from their home and May’s mother went to stay with a family friend. She and her siblings were left to house hop between relatives and friends. She told me,

I would sometimes get in contact with my brother and sister and tell them they could sleep here tonight. They would come over when my aunt would sleep and spend the night with me and leave before she would get up.

May and her siblings continued this routine for a year. By her senior year, she had missed seventy days of school. She explained that while she had tried to reach out to counselors, she hadn’t been taken seriously. In her senior of high school, May became pregnant with her first

child. She expressed feeling ashamed of her pregnancy, “Everybody was like shaming me and saying things like, I knew you were a hoe and hot butt. I can believe you got pregnant.”

Shortly after graduation, she moved in with her high school boyfriend who turned out to be abusive. She said at times he didn’t want her to leave the house and when she tried to break-up with him, he and his mother planned to kidnap her daughters. May also disclosed that he started heavily using drugs and when she was giving birth to her second daughter, he left her at the hospital. Ultimately, his verbal abuse turned into physical abuse, and she found a way to leave him. May shared that she had always been close to her five children. She spoke about the pressure she felt to not seem like a single mom or a welfare mom. She has raised her children to be extremely independent. While working in a tax office, she eventually learned how to do taxes which sustained her family for a while. Before her arrest, May told me that her grandmother became ill and she had been struggling financially with helping her daughter get ready for college. At the time, both of events had caused her a lot of stress.

I wanted to know more about May’s prison experience, which was very different from the other women interviewed. Not only was she arrested later in her life, but her incarceration also coincided with a global pandemic. I felt that it was necessary in the interview to spend a good while talking about her experiences incarcerated and the fear she had about COVID-19. May explained that almost everyone at the federal facility feared they wouldn’t make it home from prison, especially if they had a pre-existing condition. Across the country, incarcerated individuals were unable to contact their loved ones to see if they were safe. At her facility, shower times were restricted to three days a week. Women started to sneak showers which put them at risk to receive more time. May said, “You’re like a zombie. Umm but people were just sleeping through it on allergy medicine and when they would wake up, they were literally losing

their shit because they were so petrified.” She also spoke about how difficult it was to follow the recommend social distancing protocols in prison and how restricted their access to the outside became in lockdown. For example, she told me,

You don’t have internet access and you can’t communicate back and forth with anybody in the real world to say what is going on out there. You just have to count on somebody to tell you what your rights are.

I asked May what she did in prison that helped her to cope with the state of the world. She explained that in prison she realized that she loved to write, especially cards to her children and grandchildren. May also said that she worked on her business plan and read a lot of books. May was qualified for early release to reduce the spread of COVID-19. She expressed that she noticed after she was released that she had anxiety about the smallest thing which included going downstairs out of fear it might set off her ankle monitor. It was also difficult being on home confinement and probation because she couldn’t use social media to promote her business.

Rebecca

Just like I say that officer he was a white man, and he didn’t want to hear nothing I had to say.

He just knew... in his head most of that stuff was my stuff and I let them people do this. I sat there telling him that I was worried and I aint hand nothing to do with that and he threatened to take my kids... how you gonna take my kids! You don’t even know if I really did nothing! So
yeah.

Rebecca grew up in a rural county in North Carolina like May. She is fifty- two years old and works in an upholstery department. In her early twenties, Rebecca would regularly host gatherings with some of her friends and family at her apartment. Some of her friends would stay

over even while she was at work. One evening, a friend banged on her door and asked to come inside. She noticed that he had been drinking but let him inside to rest. Immediately, the police surrounded her home on a tip that she was selling drugs and that the drugs were in her apartment. They questioned everyone in the apartment while dogs searched through each room. Eventually, the drugs were found. While she wasn't charged immediately, an officer advised her to find a babysitter for her boys and to head to the police department to be questioned further. At the police department, she repeatedly tried to explain to the detective that she was not involved in any illegal drug activity and that the drugs were not hers. The detective refused to believe her, and she was booked for thirty days in jail.

With all the women I interviewed, I wanted to know what their childhood was like leading up to their involvement in the Criminal Justice System. Rebecca told me that for the most part, it had been good. While her parents weren't wealthy, they always made sure that she and her siblings had what they needed. Growing up, she was really close with her mother until her unexpected early death. Her father, despite having an alcohol problem, always maintained the job he had at the hospital. When Rebecca's mother died, she went to live with a grandmother and aunt. Eventually, her father remarried, and she and her siblings moved to a different county in North Carolina. Rebecca shared that this transition for was difficult and that she and her stepmother didn't get along most of the time. I asked Rebecca to also describe the neighborhoods she has lived in. She immediately said, "it was the hood." To clarify,

I don't think back then over that time...during that time they weren't selling drugs like they do now. It was just where we stayed at. You could tell by looking at the apartments and stuff and just know that it was...I don't know how to say it...it was a bad area.

For most of her childhood, she remembered being a tomboy and playing outside with her brother. She played softball as she got older. Rebecca also shared that she didn't really remember much about school except that she was afraid to go to the school bus stop. She expressed feeling petrified when older men would look at her and make inappropriate comments because she was considered a "big bone'ded" girl at a young age. She remembered getting off the bus one afternoon. A friend of her father knocked on the screen door and tried to get her to let him inside while her father was at work. While she didn't let him in, he grazed her breast before he left. At the time, she was only twelve-years old.

As a teenager, she remembered being "buck wild." In looking back, she felt she didn't have much of a foundation to pull her in the right direction after her mother passed. When she turned fifteen, she found out she was pregnant with her first child. At the time, she considered dropping out of high school but graduated and received her diploma. After she graduated, she worked hard to provide for her son and to secure her own apartment. Her aunt at the time told her, "You have to crawl before you walk."

Eventually, she met her first husband and they married. She was eighteen at the time. Her first husband was abusive toward her and her son. She told me that one time after they had gotten into an argument, he kicked her in the stomach while she was pregnant with her second son. After this altercation, their relationship just went downhill. While she was married, she started to notice that her oldest son was experiencing seizures. A medical assessment determined that he had fractures to his skull. Rebecca and her husband were made to take a lie detector test under the assumption that they were abusing her son. At the time she was also pregnant with her second son and was worried that child protective services would take her other son from her. She said, "My husband at the time, he had to take one. To me them people didn't care. They didn't

care that I was pregnant with my second child.” After going to court, it was determined that her husband had been physically abusing her son. She didn’t get her child back until he turned five. I asked Rebecca if she could speak about the stress associated with being a woman. She said, “I don’t know, women just catch a hard time. I’m just gonna tell you. They don’t get no break! It’s hard. It’s just hard being a momma... it hard being a single momma too!” When I asked her about the stress she experienced as she tried to get custody of her son she said,

I felt like if I kept going out to Texas and taking my money to Texas trying to get my first baby back. I felt like it was taking something from my other two kids. I felt like I wouldn’t be able to keep providing for them.

After taking a short break, Rebecca and I talked about her experience in jail. I asked her if she felt race played a role in her arrest. She said that she felt the detective who questioned her assumed the drugs were hers because she was Black. She also spoke about the conditions in jail that she experienced which included the unsanitary bathrooms and the fear she felt. She said,

I would say I was hesitant to ask for a pad because I knew how the officer was going to act. You would have officers that would interact with some of the prisoner and then you would have some that were just snogs.

Rebecca expressed frustration not being able to see her boys especially because she was suffering for a crime she had not committed. It broke her one night when her sons called crying after they had seen her face plastered on the news.

Rebecca was bailed out of jail after a friend of her father’s put her house up for collateral. While she was not charged with possession, she continues to suffer the consequences of her time in jail. For years, she thought she had still had a criminal record and avoided certain situations that might call attention to her. Luckily, she was able to keep her job after she was released.

Rebecca also expressed feeling worried around police officers and that this fear extended to her three boys. She said, “It’s not Black on Black crime. I’m talking about as far as police officer stopping your child for something stupid. I don’t think my child would make it.”

June

The biggest thing my friend said, even bigger than that, was that social professionals and criminal justice professionals who will sit with someone in front of their desk... and she said, instead of asking what is wrong with you, ask what happened to you? You know? A lot of behaviors... and one of things that people need to remove from their vocabulary is non-compliant. Noncompliance for one is just someone trying to get their needs met. You know? Find out what is wrong. What is going on? What can you do to help? What is wrong? We know if a person experiences things on that list, then they are more likely going to be involved in the criminal justice system. They are going to have a mental disorder. That is automatic. Start in the school and pay attention. You know?

The final story I want to share is June’s.

June was born in a small town in Mississippi. For the early part of her childhood, she lived with her grandmother until her mother remarried, and she moved to Chicago and gained three new siblings. She was the oldest, which at times made her the “scapegoat.” Growing up, June’s family was “financially good.” She described them as middle class. However, there was “quite a dysfunction in the household.” Her mother was both verbally and physically abusive towards her at times. She said she didn’t remember receiving affection from her mother growing up. They are now estranged. Her stepfather, while he was always functional, battled with alcoholism. As a

child, June shared that at times she felt clueless. She didn't have many friends or get invited to parties because her mother sheltered her. June also revealed that a family member molested her and her sister for several years between the ages of six to twelve. She said that she was too afraid to tell her mother because she worried about her sister and her safety. Eventually, her mother found out, and the abuse stopped. After graduating from high school, June was accepted into college. She wanted to become a social worker. June also revealed that she was sexually assaulted by a boy with whom she had gone on a date within college. She expressed feeling ashamed for not knowing how to speak up. After the end of the semester, her parents made her move back home. Her mother had developed a gambling problem which caused her to become even more abusive. She eventually moved in with a close friend from high school. She had this to say about living with her friends, "They didn't have a lot, but they were family. I had a few examples of what family is." Ultimately, her friend moved out, and June decided to join the military. While in the army, June told me that she was repeatedly stalked and assaulted by an older man that was her sergeant. She explained that she had tried multiple times to avoid him in the barracks, but he would force her to go on trips with him alone. To stop his advances, she married another man who was twenty years older than her. He eventually turned abusive. I asked if she felt comfortable contacting law enforcement about the abuse she was receiving from her husband. She said that in other situations where she had called the police, they had dismissive and condescending because of her criminal record. She told me one time that an officer had responded to her complaint by calling her a "career criminal."

June was arrested for using another's identity. She was convicted and sentenced to ten months in a federal facility. This was not the first time she was arrested. June's involvement in the CJS system started as petty theft charges. She was arrested a couple of times for stealing

groceries, cartons of cigarettes, and credit cards. In 1995, June had her first “major arrest.” She was convicted of smuggling marijuana from Jamaica to the United States. While she didn’t tell whether she served prison time, she mentioned that she was on probation for five years. After she decided to get clean, she went back to school to become a counselor. She wasn’t arrested again until 2006 for identity theft and driving with fake tags. She had moved to Chicago with her two children after her estranged husband became sick. When he passed away, she moved back to Maryland. While she was in the process of trying to get her counseling credentials transferred over, she met a man that told her that he would be able to get her back on her feet. One morning, he told her to meet him outside. They drove around to different stores and purchased high-priced items. In exchange, she received \$200. Eventually, he started asking her to come up with fake names and passports to get cashier checks. It turned out that June was working for a larger group involved in the operation. She had this to say, “Again, I am not proud of any of this.” June was also arrested for fake tags, which landed her forty days in “LA’s WORST JAIL EVER.” She told me, “I thought I was going to die. I couldn’t get any medical attention even if I were to ask for it. It was like asking for a million dollars”.

I asked if June could talk with me more about her experiences in prison. While in federal prison for identity theft, June went in with the mindset of making herself employable after her release. She asked questions about job opportunities, apprenticeships, and programs that were available. June first started working in a psych unit. She then moved on to the education department as a certified parenting skills specialist. June shared that her degree in counseling helped her in both roles.

Eventually, she started working in a career resource center as a professional resume writer. She would often help the women gain employment when they were released. She also

helped host career fairs while on the inside. June also became involved in the prison choir and took entrepreneurship classes. After she was released, June became involved in prison activism. She started speaking at events about her experiences, developed a peer specialist mentorship program, and presented trauma-informed approaches to women's incarceration at criminal justice conferences. She expressed that she is very proud of her accomplishments and has worked hard to regain her sense of self. She continues to work in the service of others through education. June emphasized that treating trauma is primary and that it should not be secondary to anything else. Her experiences battling her trauma helped her show her clients that trauma is at the core of addiction.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, PART II

The present study seeks to advance our understandings of stressful life events and involvement in the CJS among Black women. An analysis of the interview data revealed multiple pathways of participation in the CJS. Some of these events and circumstances appeared in early adolescence, while others emerged throughout the participant's adulthood. Findings revealed, several contributions to the limited body of research on African American women and crime. The first research questions addressed significant stressors present in the interviewee's lives, specifically looking for if these experiences were connected to their involvement in the CJS. Several major themes connected to their CJS involvement surfaced in the interviews: parental relationships, exposure to victimization, substance abuse, bullying, self-esteem, and self-identity. Several of these themes are also found within the literature of pathways and are addressed in next section of this chapter (Jingling 2016; Belknap 2007; Daley 1992).

The following section in this chapter, addressed various experiences of structural victimization and gender-racism among the participants looking to see if these experiences contributed to the overall stress that interviewee's experienced in their lives. As described, by GST, strain increases the likelihood of crime, particularly strains that are high in magnitude, usually seen as unjust, are associated with low social control, and create pressure or incentives for criminal coping. These types of strains may lead to a range of negative emotions such as, anger, frustration, depression, guilt, fear, and shame which can pressure individuals to act to remove strain and negative emotions. Crime is one way that an individual may reduce, escape, seek revenge, or alleviate negative emotions. Moreover, a lack of coping mechanisms often increases the likelihood that an individual may participate in crime (Agnew 2014). The last section of this chapter addressed the collateral consequences of imprisonment (i.e., in-house

violence, medical neglect, incarceration and loved ones, limited employment opportunities, parole, and stigma experienced by the participants in this study.

Research Question 1: Personal Life Events, Social Circumstances, and Relationships

Pathway 1: Familial Relationships and Hardships

General Strain Theory (GST) proposes that individuals may experience strain (stress) because of adverse life events and relationships. To reiterate, strain falls into three categories, individuals may lose something valuable such as a parent or loved one, experience mistreatment, and/or they may be unable to achieve their goals. These experiences regularly result in negative emotions, anger, depression, shame, and guilt which can be conducive to crime and deviance in the absence of and failure to adopt positive coping mechanisms (Agnew 2014; Agnew and Broidy 2006). Agnew and Broidy (2006) study which expounded on the work of Agnew (1992) examined whether strain and coping mechanisms to strain varied among men and women. They indicate, “Females more often report network related stressors (i.e., stressors involving family and friends) and are more upset when they experience network and interpersonal problems.” Theorist (Agnew, Rebellon, and Thaxton 2000; 6-7) additionally state,

While delinquency researchers have focused on a range of parenting practices, most research has focused on the emotional bond between family members and parental supervision. Data suggest that delinquency is more likely when: (a) there is a weak or negative emotional bond between parents and children, and (b) parental supervision is lax, overly strict, inconsistent, and/or harsh (i.e., excessive given the infraction, physically or verbally abusive). Data also suggest that delinquency is more likely when marital conflict is high, parents fail to teach good social and problem-solving skills, parents fail to provide adequate social support, and parents teach beliefs conducive to

delinquency - like the 'code of the street.' Other family factors, like family structure (e.g. whether both natural parents are present, family size, age of mother) and parental criminality are said to affect delinquency primarily through their effect on these processes.

In summary, "poor parenting" or the lack of parental support can become a major source of juvenile strain such that it causes both negative emotions and delinquency. Adolescence may cope with poor parenting by escaping from their parents e.g., running away, curfew violation, stealing to reduce financial dependence on parents. Seeking revenge or rebelling against parents, taking out their anger on related targets, and/or managing their negative emotions through drug and alcohol use (Agnew, Rebellon, and Thaxton 2006). Pathways perspective also speaks to the negative and often traumatic experiences that women offenders are exposed to during childhood, such as a history of being abused physically, sexually, and emotionally by family members. For instance, there is a long history of holding mothers far more accountable than fathers for their children's failures (including delinquency) and wellbeing (Belknap 2007). Enos (2001) study, reports that African American women were more likely to report their mothers and other caretakers, "as doing the best they could" in parenting but were too tempted by street life such as drug use. As Miller (1986) study indicated that routes to prison for Black women were mostly found through family members and domestic networks even though, families attempted to supervise and raise young girls. Miller (1986) describes this pathway to crime for Black girls as "domestic recruitment." Several examples of familial and parental strain were present in the women's biographies which will be further explained below. The women also adopted several coping mechanisms to the strain that they experienced as children. For some of the women, crime as a mechanism to coping with parental strain emerged in early adulthood.

The interviewees in this study almost all reported adverse childhood experiences (ACE). From their biographies, negative emotions such as frustration, resentment, and anger materialized especially when it was related to their parental relationships. For several of the women, it was because of the mistreatment and neglect they experienced as children, for others it was the early loss of a valued loved one such as a mother, father, or grandmother. In the absence of proper coping mechanisms, the women later in life turned to deviant and manipulative relationships to cope with their victimization from parents, other family members, and even some of their peers.

For instance, Rebecca experienced the loss of her mother at a very young age. Although, her father was still alive, she believed that he sent her to live with a close aunt because he felt incapable of raising her without her mother. However, she did eventually go back to living with him after he got remarried. For Rebecca, there was also a lot of tension in the household between she and her stepmother because she felt like her stepmother was trying to take the place of her mother. She had this to say about how the loss of her mother affected her,

So... Just buck wild! Just buck wild! To me, I felt like I was buck wild because I just lost my mom, and I really didn't have... I felt I didn't really have a foundation to pull me to talk about the stuff I really wanted to talk about. The stuff, I wanted to talk about was my momma and she wasn't there for me. And I felt like I didn't really trust nobody.

Rebecca explains that losing her mother caused her to feel frustrated with her personal circumstances. For her, it was the loss of both the presence of a mother and a father figure that lead to feelings of frustration and instability. Agnew (2001) refers to subjective strain as an event of condition that an individual dislikes. For some individuals, strain can be identified as high in magnitude, while for others it may be low. In Rebecca's case, it seemed that the loss of her

mother resulted in emotional distress. She believed that if her mother had been alive, she would have a better childhood and a foundation to teach her to make better choices. Rebecca also lost the presence of a father figure in her adolescence. In some ways this may have resulted in feelings of neglect, which may have caused her to act out as a teenager. For Rebecca, the absence of familiar relationships and support caused her involvement in unconventional activities or as she states, “I felt like I was buck wild.”

For Michelle, her mother’s mental health prevented her from adequately parenting. Michelle explained that her mother would regularly lock herself in her room. She and her siblings would care for themselves most days. At twelve, she became responsible for both her younger brother and sister after her parents divorced. Michelle also experienced the loss of her father, who had moved to a different state after the divorce. While her father, regularly sent expensive gifts, his absence left Michelle alone to provide for her family. Michelle said about her parent’s absence,

Hmm... I was basically like the adult. I was 12 and I was taking care of an 8-year-old and a 6-year-old. I felt like I was wronged. So, I would skip school and everything because I was taking care of my siblings and I didn’t really have time to focus on myself.

As stress piled up, from schoolwork, taking care of her siblings, and ultimately running a household, Michelle had to eventually drop out of school. Above, Michelle explains that she felt “wronged” by her mother because at a young age she had to become the adult of the house. She felt that her mother’s condition and to some degree her mother’s choices prevented her from achieving good grades and her personal aspirations. Agnew (1992) argues that strain can refer to a “relationship in which others are not treating the individual as he or she would be like to be

treated.” For Michelle, it was the unjust treatment that she experienced from her mother that caused her to feel anger, resentment, and frustration. It was also, the stress that she experienced being unable to achieve her “personal aspirations” such as being a good student and financial stability. To some degree, Michelle’s “personal aspirations’ may have also included being a normal teenager instead having to take on the role of a parent. In the absence of strong social support networks, Michelle turned to both self-destructive and at times violent coping mechanisms, such as smoking weed, skipping school, sex work, running away, and repeated fights with her mother. She also used sex work to cope with the financially strain she experienced in the absence of her father and the mother. Chesney- Lind and Randall (2014;44) state that “running away from home for any length of time often leads girls into prostitution. Among the most common methods of entering that desperate existence, running away is most common, followed by being abandoned.” Oftentimes, prostitution became a way to survive. Running away was resistance strategy that Michelle employed to avoid the abuse and neglect that she experienced at home, which will be explained further in how girls cope with victimization.

While interviewed, Michelle shared that she was sent to a juvenile detention center after getting into an altercation with her mother. She was the only participant that had this experience. She stated,

Yeah, as a matter of fact, that was when I got in a fight with my mom... or either I tried to run away, and the police found me. I ended up going to the juvenile detention center because my mom felt like that was where I was going to learn my lesson.

Michelle and her mother would often get into altercations with each other which resulted in Michelle running away to escape the mistreatment. Agnew (2001) suggest that individuals may “employ behavioral coping strategies that are intended to terminate, reduce, or escape from the strainful events and conditions.” Young girls are often criminalized for employing coping mechanism such as running away, not going to school, truancy, curfew violation, and unruliness at home. Chesney- Lind and Randall (2014), state these are all considered status offenses because they would not be regarded as wrongdoings if committed by an adult. Most young girls like Michelle, enter the CJS system through so-called status offenses oftentimes at their parents’ wishes. Davis (2007:425) contends,

Age or minor status of the girls leaves them powerless in defining what actually occurred when the police arrive on the scene. The tradition of upholding parental authority over the rights of children results in authorities nearly always accepting the parent’s or guardian’s definition of the situation. Although filing assault charges may be one strategy that parents or guardians use as a last resort to gain help in their overall control struggles with their daughter, in most instances, they only intend for their daughters to be gone for short periods of time, such as a short-term stay in Juvenile Hall to “teach her a lesson.”

As illustrated in the previous excerpt, Michelle’s mother reached out to authorities to try to find a way to “teach” Michelle a lesson. She later explained that she and the other teenagers needed counseling rather than being locked up at the center. As a young adult, Michelle was involved in sex work. She eventually ended up in a toxic and manipulative relationship with her boyfriend who set her up for a crime she didn’t commit. In the absence of a mother figure, Michelle sought out love and affection in an intimate partner.

Autumn was another participant that felt neglected by her mother as well as her father. As her biography reveals, both her parents suffered from addiction which left she and her siblings without parental guidance and support. When asked about her childhood she said,

It was rocky! You know? Family members, they didn't really want us because my mother is the black sheep of the family. So, we were mistreated. We got taken... I got taken away from my mother because I was raped by her boyfriend. And she denied it and she went through mental health issues all my life including the grand kids' life. You know it's just a mental thing for her. My father got himself together after he got off cocaine and everybody was passing away. He went through the little death thing, and he is still living. You know I communicate with him more than I communicate with my mother. I don't communicate... (pauses for a moment). Being pushed around from family member to family member made me stronger because me and my mother don't get along and I don't (Soft tired breath) I don't blame her for none of the things that happened, or I don't hate her for it. Because you know you get over things but in between those times, I had to do a little stuff you know I didn't want to do. Like I said, I went to prison more than once for probation violence it was because I didn't pay my probation and I got busted with marijuana.

Autumn's mother also suffered from mental health issues like Michelle's mother. To recall, Autumn was sexually abused by one of her mother's boyfriends, which her mother denies happened. As a result, she and her brother were placed in the care of regularly abusive relatives. Researchers have found that in the case of abused girls, mothers are often considered the active agents of obstructing knowledge about abuse. This is often interpreted as a failure to protect their

daughters (Crossley 2000: Richie 1996). Autumn and Michelle were both sexually abused by a close family member as children. This will be further explained in the section below, *exposure to victimization*.

June's experience with her mother differed from Rebecca's and Michelle's, partly because her mother sheltered her. Michelle also revealed that she had been verbally, physically, and psychological abused by her mother, which persistent into adulthood. She had this to say about her mother and their relationship,

Also, I need to throw in there, when I talked about my mom and physical and emotional, one of the things that never happened in our household was like nurturing or a sign of affection. We were never told, I love you! Never those things in our house.

Without their mother's nurture and affection, June like Michelle searched for love in other relationships and intimate partners who were habitually abusive. In addition to Autumn, Michelle, and Rebecca, June also experienced broken parental bonds, such as parental rejection. Agnew (2001) discusses:

Parents who reject their children do not express love or affection for them, show little interest in them, provide little support to them, and often display hostility toward them. Parental rejection is likely to create much train because it may seriously threaten many of the child's goals, values, needs, activities, and/or identities. Parental rejection is likely to be seen as unjust given cultural expectation and the experience of other children. Parental rejective is associated with very low rather than high social control.

For all the women, it seemed that familial relationships, especially parental figures, were absent, neglectful, or abusive throughout their adolescence. For most of the women, these events were experienced in combination with one another, and all appeared to create additional stress for the women as children. The interviewees above all seemed to fail to find healthy coping mechanism to childhood trauma. This led the women to turn to other coping mechanism such as running away from home, associating with deviant peers, and dropping out of school.

Pathway 2: Exposure to Victimization (Sexual Trauma, IPV, Manipulation)

While adverse childhood events (ACE) and relationships appeared to play a significant role in how the women interpreted and contextualized their incarceration, exposure to victimization also seemed to play a substantial role in the women's involvement in the CJS. Several studies within Pathways Perspective have examined the disproportionate high rates of trauma, particularly sexual and physical abuse experienced by incarcerated women and girls (Belknap & Holsonger 2006; Richie 1996; Miller 1986) Almost all the participants experienced violence as either a child or later into adulthood. Several of the women experienced intimate partner violence (IPV). While most of the women were eventually able to leave their partners; leaving their partners meant they were entirely financially and emotionally responsible for caring for their household. Exposure to victimization appeared as a pathway to incarceration among the participants.

Data suggest that racial and ethnic minorities experience higher rates of IPV. According to national data, 31.7% of white women have experienced IPV compared to 40.9% of Black women. Moreover, perceptions of IPV may also differ among racial and ethnic groups. This might affect the likelihood that an individual would be comfortable disclosing to health care providers their victimization (McNeely & Torres 2009). Discriminatory police misconduct can

leave Black women vulnerable to intrapersonal violence in their community. Residents in low income and communities of color may report feeling a lack of care or concern for their well-being and their communities in the case of an IPV incident (Potter 2008). Furthermore, women also described their interactions with officers as abusive. This may prompt some women to adopt survival-based techniques that ultimately minimize their own needs. Other explanations may include limited access to resources and support in low-income communities, racism, and systemized forms of oppression (Potter 2008; Belknap et al 2009). This is discussed further in the upcoming sections that speaks to experiences of gender racism.

Agnew (2006) contends that individuals who experience negative treatment such as intimate partner violence (IPV) often turn to negative coping mechanisms to deal with trauma. May, Michelle, and Rebecca were three participants who were manipulated into crime and the CJS. As the biographies reveal, Michelle was manipulated by an ex-boyfriend and May by a business partner who set her up to take the fault for tax fraud. As stated by Dehart (2008), women's criminal offending is often a function of their victimization, which tends to lead to poorer life outcome in adulthood for female offenders. Furthermore, she indicates that women and girls have life histories characterized by unrelenting trauma and these experiences can separate them from legitimate social institutions such as family, school, and employment. As illustrated in section 1, families can also be the source of traumatic experiences and victimization. For young girls who experience trauma in the household, running away and involvement in deviance can become a way to cope and escape from said trauma (Agnew 2001). This experience can significantly impact their criminal offending, mental well-being, and social relationships. While various sources of victimization appeared in the interviewee's biographies, experiences of sexual trauma proved to have a significant impact of the interviewee's childhood

and later adulthood experiences. Among the six interview's, five participants disclosed that they had been sexual victimized from experiencing chronic molestation and intimate partner violence. In various ways, it seemed that their sexual trauma led to later beliefs about themselves and their own identity. For example, when describing an encounter, she had with an older man at twelve years old. Rebecca said,

I was... I was so scared to go to the bus stop because I was a big-bone'ded girl...like at a young age... and I would feel some way because older men would be looking, and I would be scared to get off the bus stop. And when I would get off the bus, I would see those same older men, and they would say stuff, and I would run all the way home.

The idiom, "big bone'ded" is often used to refer to young girls that are more developed than their peers. In the excerpt above, Rebecca refers to herself as "big bone'ded to show that her body appeared to be more mature than most of the girls who were her age. She felt that because she appeared to be more physically mature, she encountered older men that would make sexual and suggestive comments to her. Now as a mother, Rebecca tells her daughter "Not to sit on no man's lap, don't do none of that." She explained that she is fearful that her daughter will also have similar experiences with older men. For instance, when Michelle was asked to describe herself as a teenager, she used words like "fast" and "grown." To further explain she indicated, "Being fast? Smoking weed, having sex, not coming in when I was supposed to. Skipping school. Yeah!"

Researchers have examined the early adultification of Black girls (Epstein, Blake, Gonzalez 2017; Sanchez et al. 2019; Gilmore and Bettis 2021). Adultification refers to the societal view that black girls are less innocent and more adult-like than their white counterparts

which can result in Black girls receiving less nurture, protection, support and even comfort. Perceptions of adultification can also assume that Black girls are more experienced with and have more knowledge about sex (Sanchez et al., 2019). This can leave girls further vulnerable to abuse. For women like Michelle, the victimization she experienced as a young girl seemed to be internalized into how she later viewed her childhood and herself.

Internalized adultification seemed heavily present in the interviews as well which in Michelle's case presented her with sex work as an employment opportunity. For example, when Michelle was asked to describe herself as a teenager, she used the words "fast and "grown." When asked to explain, she said, "Being fast? Smoking weed, having sex, not coming in when I was supposed to. Skipping school. Yeah!" Later, as an adult Michelle turned to sex work to provide for her family. She said,

I mean after I lost my first job, I started selling weed. It went from me just selling weed and I'm already fast to like I'm already having sex for free...to like...now I'm just a prostitute and getting paid to have sex. So, I completely like, I didn't work a job. The last job I had before prison was at a grocery store and after that I discovered prostitution and everything and the money was so good than after that... I...It's like an addiction.

Michelle explains in this excerpt that it was illogical for her to continue to work a conventional job when she was making easy money as a sex worker. As she explains, she was already having sex and it just made sense for her to get paid for it. Michelle continued to work as a sex worker because she was better able to financially provide for her daughters as well as purchase nice items for them. Eventually, the money and the lifestyle became an addiction. As Michelle's

biography reveals, she was eventually arrested for conspiracy of human trafficking after she reconnected with her ex-boyfriend. She said,

“I was so brainwashed with him, and he made me feel like living that lifestyle was okay. Giving him all my money was okay! Doing whatever he wanted so that we could keep our family together all that was what I wanted. So, when it came...it was crazy because I had left him. I was tired of the life, and I was tired of prostituting. I was tired of him taking all my money.”

Michelle explained that her boyfriend had brainwashed her into thinking that she would be able to survive through sex work. She said that she gave him all the money she made because she was under the impression that it would keep their family together. To further quote, she said,

“So...my baby daddy was manipulating me. I was staying in the relationship because I...I thought that was what I was supposed to do for the family or whatever... so you know...my lawyer made it look like I was the victim and ended up victimizing somebody else. So, even though I didn't do anything with the girl.”

June's biographic narrative revealed a chronic history of sexual trauma. As children, she and her younger sister were chronically abused by a family member. Sexual trauma also carried into her adulthood experiences. The excerpt below describes an experience she had as a teenager. She said,

It took another 20-30 years or so in my thirties and revelations to... that I realized that I was raped. The dealing with guilt and shame. You know I felt guilt, or I felt shame and part of a thing is like...okay how stupid am I? One that I was raped and two he became my boyfriend you know. He was my boyfriend.

Agnew and Broidy (2006) suggest that women are more likely to cope with strain through self-directed coping mechanism. June in particular spoke about the shame and guilt that she experienced because of her victimization. Later as an adult, June married a man who was extremely abusive in order to escape sexual advances from a commanding officer she had in the military. In her interview, she recalled a time when she and her husband were in physical altercation, and she had to call the police. When the officers arrived, they refused to arrest her husband, implied that she was a “career criminal”, and didn’t provide any assistance. She said,

You know? I remember before when I went to prison, that same person that was in the household mistreating my children. He and I got into this altercation. That was on a Saturday, and I was due to self-report on that Monday. And he was doing all this stud and it even got physical and I called the police, and my son was there, and he got me to leave. The police pulled up and they asked me for my ID and my name. Uhm... I was visibly shaking, and I even have some bruises and I am explaining to them. And I remember what he called me. Oh, what’s that word...lifetime offender or something...it’s a word that I heard...oh, a career offender.

In this excerpt, June shows that the attending officers on the scene denied her assistance because they were able to access her criminal background. This excerpt also shows that Black women with involvement in the CJS are often assumed to have provoked their abusers and therefore are justly the recipients of the abuse they receive from their partners.

Researchers have found that most incarcerated women report witnessing IPV in their childhood home and later experienced it as an adult (Richie 1996; Potter 2006). Several of the interviewee’s witnessed their fathers verbally and physically abuse their mothers as children. For instance, May witnessed her father verbally and emotionally abuse her mother. As a child she

judged her mother because she wasn't able to parent. However, now as an adult she realizes her mother was depressed for most of her childhood. She said:

Because I judged her and held her accountable...in a very unfair way but at that time... I wouldn't have had any idea to do anything different. My dad had so poisoned my mind against my mom, she's fat... you don't want to be like her...you mom is so stupid...well turns out he was sleeping with her friends. you know she didn't keep herself up... she didn't try to lose weight... but apparently, she was depressed. You know? Her hair was never healthy because she was so stressed.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) are often traumatic and stressful for the women who experience them. For many women, exposure to one ACE can often increase the risk of being subjected to other problematic experiences. This was the case with several of the interviewees who experienced sexual abuse as children and later intimate partner violence. ACE can also increase the risk that an individual may experience unemployment, lower education attainment, and perform poorly in school. Furthermore, individuals may become more likely to participate in risky behaviors such as drug use, smoking, unprotected sex, and teenage pregnancy (Boppre and Boyer 2021). For several of the women in the study, there seemed to be a connection between experiences of ACE and later substance abuse.

Pathway 3: Bullying Linked to Self-esteem and Self-identity

Agnew (1992; 2002) uses the term victim-offender overlap to explain how individuals cope with experiences of victimization through delinquent acts. To explain further, "victimization experienced represents negative stimuli that can increase negative affective states and ultimately deviant behaviors" (Park and Metcalfe 2019; 1). Furthermore, Agnew (2001) argues that social supports, personality traits, and peer association should be expected to

condition the relationship and that victimization and delinquency should be weaker when positive supporting mechanisms were present (Park and Metcalfe 2019). In this study participant's biographies also revealed instances of being bullied by peer groups. This was significantly linked to how the women perceived themselves as adults. Data indicates that Black students are less likely than their white peers to report bullying leading to underreporting of bullying among these racial minority groups (Lopez, Esbensen, and Brick 2010). Almost all the women shared experiences of being bullied by peers because they didn't necessarily fit in. This may have contributed to their choices in friendships later in life. The bullying and rejection from their peers and even family members contributed to their beliefs, making it difficult for some women to have a positive self-image.

Many of the women also shared that they had self-esteem issues throughout their childhood. Low self-esteem and a low understanding of self may have served as a pathway to the CJS for some of the women. In several interviews, self-identity and self-esteem were mentioned by the study participants in conjunction with their victimization. Rebecca was asked what she remembered learning about herself in school. She replied,

Hmm... I don't know! I really don't... I don't know! I learned that I was a strong person.

As far as people bullying me and stuff...I knew that what they were saying wasn't true.

Because some of the stuff I had to deal with... I didn't ask to deal with it. So!

Rebecca expressed frustration over being bullied for the way she dressed and kept her hair in school even though the experience made her stronger. Again, this is an example of Agnew's Strain Theory (2001) because she experienced negative treatment from her peers which caused her to feel rejected.

Later in life, Autumn was arrested for allowing the “wrong people” in her house while she hosted parties. Some of the individuals were involved in selling drugs. When asked what she learned from her experience in jail, she said,

Don't have people in your house! Don't have people in your house and if you do, watch they every move because like I say, I don't know where half of that mess came from, I don't know nothing about that! And they tell me I was selling for somebody, I ain't even know how to sell that mess.

Eventually, she found out that her ex-husband's girlfriend called the cops on her. For Rebecca, her lack of ability to set boundaries with others, i.e., the people she allowed to stay at her house, led to her incarceration.

Like Rebecca, May also shared that she didn't know how to set proper boundaries with people in her life. She was arrested for her involvement in a tax fraud scheme when her business partner turned on her and blamed her for everything. When asked what she felt was associated with her arrest, she said,

Yeah! Because I didn't have boundaries or the proper... I didn't know what my self-worth was. I don't know if I had low self-esteem, but I didn't know how valuable I was just my presence, and I just accepted everything from anybody.

June was another participant who also expressed that she didn't fully understand who she was because her parents sheltered her until she was young. She believed that because she was sheltered as a child, she didn't truly understand how to set boundaries. She stated,

I was always on the outside looking in. Everyone else got it, and I felt clueless. I would go along to get along, and I would act as if... Just being a follower. My mom always said I was gullible, but I didn't really have any friends. You know I wanted that type of

socialization. But my mom always felt that everyone was beneath us. She would call everyone low lives.

Each participant seemed to have an internal struggle with self-esteem and self-identity. While it didn't appear to be a direct cause of their involvement in the CJS, it made the women above question their self-worth, which led to some of their relationship choices. For some, low self-esteem and identity entangled them in abusive relationships, business partnerships, and with peers involved in illegal activity.

Several of the participants accepted personal responsibility for their involvement in the criminal justice system. This appeared to be true even for the women that were falsely accused of committing crimes like Rebecca, Michelle, and May. Many of the women did acknowledge that relationships and circumstances such as adverse childhood experiences and relationships propelled their crime. However, they also conveyed that if they would have made better choices in relationships, they might have had a better life outcome.

Pathway 4: Substance Abuse

The rise in Black female imprisonment can be attributed to a number of cultural and social factors including stricter drug policies, high rates of substance abuse, and mental health concerns. All these factors can shape a woman's pathway into the criminal justice system, yet there seems to be no urgency to adopt gender-sensitive treatment services. Moreover, prisons are poorly equipped to handle mental illness and substance abuse and instead use a "one size fits all" treatment plan, leading to high recidivism rates among users.

Incarcerated women tend to have longer addiction trajectories and post-traumatic stress disorder than their male counterparts (Salisbury and Van Voorhis (2009: 543). Strain theory proposes that greater exposure to strain will be associated with an increased risk of heavy

alcohol, marijuana, and other illicit drug use. In Agnew's (1990) study that examined the origins of delinquent events and offenders, he found that drug offenses were primarily committed because of social pressure, self-gratification, and curiosity/ thrills. Jack Katz (1998) also explains that some adolescent crime can be committed because it is viewed as fun, exciting, and thrilling. It seemed to be the case that for some of the women, substance use started off as a way to not only cope with ACE but also as a way to fit in with their peers and to have a good time. For some of the women, what was once thrilling and fun, became an addiction. For some, substance abuse exacerbated the strain that they already experienced as well as produced a variety of new strains.

Substance abuse appeared in two of my interviewee's life histories, Chaplain Jack and June. Although, other interviewees were arrested for drug related charges or revealed they recreationally used drugs, Chaplain Jack and June's biographies seemed to be most identifiable as having intensive histories of substance abuse, which is why they are highlighted below. As a teenager, Chaplain Jack experimented with drugs to fit in with her peers. It later turned into a full-fledged addiction after her grandmother passed away. To recall, Agnew (2001) states, the death of a loved one can cause individuals to experience negative emotions which women often cope with through self-destructive mechanism such as alcohol and drug use. After the death of her grandmother, Chaplain Jack was arrested and convicted of armed robbery with the intent to cause bodily harm.

Chaplain Jack's substance use started when she was a teenager when she would recreationally smoke weed, drink, and party with her friends. In describing her recreational substance use, she had this to say,

So, it started junior year. I started to drink every day before class. I started smoking weed.

By the time I started high school, I started experimenting with snorting coke and doing meth and acid. All the things those high schoolers teenagers do from the '70s to '80s.

I then asked, what she felt was the catalyst for her addiction and experimentation with different substances to which she replied,

So, like I said I went to a private high school for most of my life and there were never really a lot of Blacks around because they could never really afford the tuition. So, it was only a handful and because I was always curious and wanted to know the wild side of things. So, the time I got to high school there were other African American kids around, but they had gone to catholic school all their life. They were pretty stayed and laid while I hanged out with the wild bunch of white kids.

Chaplain Jack was an upper middle class Black woman from California as her biography revealed. Throughout her adolescence and as a teenager, she attended mostly private religious schools despite living in a socioeconomically and racially diverse neighborhood. Chaplain Jack on several occasions mentioned feeling different from the other children in her neighborhood. In the excerpt above, she links her strained relationships with her black peers to her family's wealth and status, and to some degree being drawn to the party lifestyle. Research studies on race, class, and crime have mostly focused on the causes of crime and involvement in the CJS among poor racial disadvantaged groups. There are very few if any studies, that have examined criminal involvement among middle- class Black women. Likewise, there are also no studies that examine substance use among middle class Black girls. As Black Feminist and Intersectional scholar, Collins (2002) points out the experiences of middle-class Black women vary from their working class and poorer counterparts, despite both group's struggle against racism and sexism. Butler-

Sweet (2017) states, “Like the black middle class as a whole, women of this class are faced with a dilemma whereby the advantages of middle-class status are coupled with disadvantages of being Black and a woman in a society gripped by both racism and sexism.” (Collins 2002; Butler Sweet 2017; 372). Scholar (Butler- Sweet 2017) points out that middle class Black women also experience pressures from attacks about from other Black women and girls who accused them of “acting white.” Chaplain Jack’s biographies reveal the interconnectedness of race, class, and substance abuse

Chaplain Jack was drawn to experimenting with drugs through her desire to feel accepted by her white counterparts. For her, it seemed as that curiosity, and in some ways, privilege led to her drug use. It also seemed as though social isolation and rejection played a vital role. For example, “I had had such bad experiences around Black kids from my neighborhood growing up and stuff that I thought they were all the same.” For Chaplain Jack feelings of rejection from her peers may have cause her to turn to others as a way to fit in.

Later as a young adult, Chaplain Jack explained that she was a “functional addict”, which to her meant the following,

I got a job at a trauma center but at that point, I was really bad on drugs. It was nonsense. I partied. I was young. I was doing a bunch of stuff it was all over the place. In 1991, I quit working and just kind of committed myself to be a dope feign because in my mind, I was going to be the best dope feign there was. The crazy things you tell yourself.”

In summary, Chaplain Jack appeared to be lured into participating in substance use through her peer relationships and because of the rejection that she experienced from her Black counterparts.

As an adult, the passing of her grandmother, caused her to experience emotions such as

frustration and anger, she coped with these emotions by diving deeper into her addiction and later subsequent crime.

June's biography revealed a different pathway to addiction than Chaplain Jack's. As stated, June started using drugs while she was in the military as a young adult. At the time, she was also relentlessly pursued by one of her commanding officers. Like Chaplain Jack, June claimed that her drug use started out as a thrilling experience. She explained,

And we played cards, listened to music, and drank and you know smoked weed and whatever other kinds of drugs because back then it was... I forget what class and quaaludes all those things and we would just trip and laugh and it just sounded more interesting to me.

While in the military, June married an older man who doubled in her age. She explained that she married him to escape the advances of another officer who had sexually abused her on multiple occasions. She later realized that the man she married was also abusive and used drugs heavily. While married, June also started to spiral out of control in her addiction. She was eventually kicked out of the military because of a positive drug test." Ultimately, she moved back home with her two children and left her husband. Over the course of several years, she relapsed and was arrested on multiple occasions for petty theft. In explaining this time in her life, she shared,

Let's see, the first time I was arrested was in 1992. I was stealing in the grocery store and at that point, I was really heavy in my addiction. I would use all my food stamps to buy drugs, and I had two children, and you know my way of feeding them was... I would go to the store and steal things.

Although June relapsed several times over the span of ten years, she eventually got herself clean and earned her master's degree in counseling. She worked as a counselor for several years until

the death of her ex-husband. She explains that this loss resulted in her getting kicked out of her in-law's house and having to move to a different state. When she moved, her counseling credentials expired, and she was left jobless. In an effort to find work, she reached out to a neighbor who happened to be involved in a complex identity theft scheme. He told her that he would pay her \$200 to ride in the car with him and purchase expensive items with fake credit cards. June said:

Now granted, this is ten years after I had made a complete change in my life. I had gone back to school and was working. You know doing the right thing. So, started doing these things and there is a sober lifestyle and there is a using lifestyle, and you know...the things I had started to do and having these meetings with people... uhm...was only a matter of time before I started using again. I did. I did start getting high.

June explains further than she relapsed into her addiction because of the lifestyle she was living to make ends meet even though she had been clean for ten years prior. June's pathway to the CJS is interesting, unlike many of the other participants she was arrested at an older age. She also talked extensively about how she was able to recognize that she was relapsing because at the time she was an addiction specialist. June and the other's involved in the identity theft scheme were eventually arrested. Unlike, the other individuals involved with June's case, June was lucky in that she only received two years because the judge recognized that she had an addiction. She recalled,

Yes. I was sentenced there for two years, but the judge and see here is another situation where I...I like to consider myself privileged because there was a mandatory minimum...but I was charged with bank fraud, mail fraud, and conspiracy, just a slew of things and there were five of us and I got the least amount of time than anyone to the

point that they were calling me a snitch. But I mean, I'm a former counselor and there were just certain things that I knew. I had relapsed and you know I had made some decisions that were just not smart decisions. But I knew enough to talk about my drug use and I guess once they did the probation report or whatever.

June could be considered lucky as she was able to enter a nine-month drug program and self-report while she was on pre-trial. This was not the case for Chaplain Jack. Both Chaplain Jack and June's addiction led to their involvement in crime and later incarceration. They were both introduced to drugs through their peer and intimate relationships and the thrill of drug use. However, as time progressed so did their addiction.

Several of the women recalled instances of being bullied as a child and as a teenager. In the following section, these experiences of bullying will be linked to perceptions of self-esteem and self-identity. Although, bullying is identified as a form of victimization, many of the women spoke about the impact that it had on their self-esteem as young girls which is why it is examined in theme 4, rather than in the context of victimization.

Research Question 2: Personal and Structural Victimization

Highlighted above are examples of personal victimization that several interviewees faced. The following section will highlight the structural victimization that the women faced because of their incarceration. Many of these examples are linked to their understanding and experiences of gendered racism in various contexts.

Understandings of Gendered Racism

Across the globe, Black women continue to experience gendered racism because of their identities. As Link and Oser (2018:24) state:

Gendered racism operates on multiple levels, meaning it can be individual and institutional and does not affect the recipient in a vacuum. On the individual level, the perception of gendered racism at times can be very subtle (e.g. microaggression) and even ambiguous. If happening repeatedly, the woman might feel the need to create a rationalizing narrative for anger or frustration she is feeling, or the behavioral reaction she exhibits, thus engaging in criminogenic thinking to "right the wrong"...An example of gendered racism at the institutional level would be the perception of unfair treatment by the police or courts because of one's status as an African American woman.

For some Black women, gendered racism can exacerbate the violence and abuse they face. It is argued that Black women in the United States are characterized and exposed to mental and physical stressors triggered by gendered racism (Spates, Evans, and James 2020). This study examined the ways multiple marginalized identities such as race, class, gender, and sexuality impacted the lives of Black women involved in the criminal justice system. The women I interviewed were asked two separate questions regarding gendered racism. The questions were separated so that the women could speak to both experiences. Different ideas regarding race and gender emerged from the interviews. Some of the women recalled experiences of racism and or sexism throughout their lives, while others spoke about the experiences of being Black and women in general. They all pointed out different instances in which they felt personally victimized because of their race and gender. Scholars often focus on Black women's challenges such as (poverty, unemployment, physical and mental health, incarceration, race, gender wage gap, etc.) However, they general do so without conceptualizing the role of social conditions. In this section, the participants speak to what it is like being a Black woman in America

highlighting (e.g., stigma, mass incarceration, single motherhood, substance abuse, prostitution, discrimination in employment, colorism, and institutional racism in the child welfare system.)

June was one of the interviewees that spoke in general about the experiences of being a Black woman in America. When asked if she believed that there were stressors associated with being Black and if these experiences have impacted you, she said,

With women, there is an added burden with you know being ostracized simply because you are a mother. You're a mother you are a woman! You are a caretaker...how dare you make a decision that causes you to end up incarcerated. You know? Then the guilt... the guilt associated with it. Nobody as a child says that I want to be a crackhead when I grow up or a gang banger or dope feign. Nobody wants to be an outcast."

In the quote above, June is speaking to the stress that women experiences as mothers who are also substance abusers. She conveys that there is a stigma associated with being a woman who is battling addiction compared to men. Data indicates that 80% of Black mothers are the primary providers of their households, often while they are working low jobs and trying to combat the stigma associated with relying on governmental assistance (Spates, Evans, James 2020).

Chaplain Jack took this time to talk about the overall incarceration rate of Black women in the United States. She spoke of drug policy and Regan's war on drugs which she described as 'bullshit.'" She said,

Where you know we weren't importing the drugs. We didn't own the shit! You know, what I am saying? So, get the Black man out of the community, who is supposed to take... so then the burden falls on the Black women. So Black women then have to go to

work and traditionally they stayed at home and raised their children because Black men worked. Then, Black men became dope peddlers and so on and so on and then they are targets to be arrested., So you know yes, there is an increase based on survival...just on survival in trying to keep the family together. Well, then that doesn't work and then they end up... just because they don't have any skills to prostitute and in order to prostitute, they need to use drugs to numb them themselves.

Chaplain Jack is speaking to the experiences of Black women who are forced into deviance and crime to provide for their families in the absence of an incarcerated husband. She also explains that stress is associated with trying to survive as a single Black mother. Moreover, women often turn to drugs to numb themselves from what they must do to survive.

May explained that "subtle racism" in her hometown prevented African Americans from working in specific jobs.

Yep, and it was... it was subtle lowkey racism there. Like nobody said ... okay if you wanted an office job, you had to be light skin or white. And if you even applied for the job, people laughed at you like you're never going to get that job. So... what you don't know because we're on the phone is that I am dark skin.

In addition to the subtle racism of her hometown May also believed that racism might have played a role in her arrest. She stressed, "Uhhhh in my arrest? If a white person had done it...I don't even think they would have been charged with a crime. It would have been overlooked."

Colorism also played a role in how the women perceived their incarceration experiences. As Butler- Sweet (2017, 375) states, Moreover, biracial women are often viewed as having a

beauty advantage when white standards of beauty including light skin and “good hair” are so highly valued in the black community. She states,

biracial women are frequently viewed as “exotic” and physically attractive in a way that sets them apart from other women. This perception has made mixed race women the subject of suspicion and jealousy in heterosexually driven relationships in communities of color.”

For instance, Michelle talked a lot about her experiences as a light skin woman. She explained that it frequently played a role in how she was treated in school and her neighborhood. For her, her skin complexion served as protection from certain forms of violence while incarcerated, which will be explained later. However, it also made her target to be bullied by her peers. When asked to share more about her experiences being Black and Puerto Rican and how it impacted her life, she said,

Uhhhh. It didn't. Like my dad's side of the family kind of like was racist but they accepted us of course... because we were his kids. But, I mean ughhh... and being Black... I was always the type of kid that didn't claim my Black side. I was always well...I'm Puerto Rican. I'm not Black... Ummm. I felt like I was better than everybody else because I was mixed.

When asked about how her identity impacted her interactions with her peers, she said,

I guess like the kids would always make fun of me because you know...I had long hair and they didn't have long hair so of course, they was hatin and everything. They was hatin' because I was light skin. I was the only light skin in my school.

As experiences of colorism seemed to appear in several of the interview's experiences. Michelle also faced a form of structural violence in the neighborhood that she grew up in. After living in a shelter, she explained that her mom moved her and her siblings to the "hood." She described her neighborhood as primarily African American. I asked her if there was much crime going on in her neighborhood, to which she replied, "Yeah! It was always either shooting or police because the drug dealers ran around. There were always fights and stuff."

Lastly, Rebecca's experience of gendered- racism is connected to trying to get custody of her son before her arrest. As her biography in Chapter IV revealed, child protective services (CPS) took her oldest son because he suffered seizures. When CPS took her son, which in another state across the country, she and her other sons had to travel back and forth to attend court hearings. She expressed that at the time traveling back and forth over the course of four years, had become emotionally and financially draining to the extent that she was considering giving up custody. She exclaimed,

Because the system was failing me because I'm sitting here telling them the truth and they
Probably need more here trying to make me out a liar. When I was telling them the truth!
And I knew I ain't done nothing to that baby.

Black women often experience stigma in the child welfare system, just as Rebecca's experience exhibits. Dorothy Roberts (2019; 1-2) illustrated this interaction very clearly,

Every institution contributes to this policing, whether we are talking about prisons, police, public assistance, schools, health care, or foster care. Every single one of these systems operates in a way to monitor, regulate, punish, and devalue Black mothers.

Policing Black mothers is an essential part of the long history of institutionalized racism, white supremacy, and patriarchy in America. I do not have time to go into that long history, but if you think about it, you will recognize that the very origins of slavery in the United States were invested in policing Black mothers to exploit their reproductive labor and to ground the oppressive notion of Black people's innate inferiority in Black women's childbearing.

Furthermore, she states,

Yet one aspect of the carceral state that polices Black mothers that often gets overlooked is the child welfare system. It's amazing that this gets so little attention given that it's such a powerful system. It's a system that allows government agents to force their way into your home without a warrant and take your children away based on unproven allegations and subjective suspicions before any adjudication of wrongdoing.^[2] Most of the children in the foster care system were removed from their parents on charges of child neglect because of living conditions related to poverty.

Several impediments should while examining gendered racism among participants. For instance, individuals might not have been able to put into words their experiences or might not have had the background knowledge to fully understand the intersection of both gender and racism that meshed with my own academic training on the topics. For example, asking someone to explain their experience through an intersectional lens requires to some degree being exposed to the term "intersectionality" and then understanding how the term operates within their life. Again, several of the women were able to talk about experiences of racism or sexism in part because of the interview questions, however, being able to explain how both intersected in their

lives in a particular situation seemed to pose a challenge because of the lack of exposure to the terminology.

In looking back at the interview questions, it might have produced more relevant findings if I had provided examples of gender racism or explained the concept. However, both might have produced responses that were oriented to my ideas and assumptions, thereby compromising the data. Future studies should explore how certain methodological approaches impact the findings of participants when trying to investigate how participants conceptualize and experience gendered racism.

To reiterate, several of the interviewees experienced some form of what sociologists would call structural violence in the form of gendered racism. While not all of them were able to explain these experiences as gender racism, they did express feeling frustrated with their personal situation and the system that contributed to their oppression. It was unclear whether gender racism directly played a role in their involvement in the CJS but as May revealed, she probably would not have been arrested or charged if she was had been white. And, as Chaplain explains, it's just hard being a Black woman because of the structural barriers that make it harder just to survive.

Research Question 3: Collateral Consequences and Coping Post-Incarceration

The section below will address the interviewees' experiences while incarcerated and subsequently their experiences after being released. Incarcerated women are routinely exposed to the consequences of imprisonment in two spaces, inside the prison wall and once released (Issac and Lockhart 2001). Inside the prison walls, consequences might include poor physical and mental health because of scarce resources, heightened exposure to violence, and restricted access to human capital i.e., money, education, employment skills, and material goods. Serving

time in prison also usually means extended isolation from loved ones such as family, friends, and children. Imprisonment forces individuals to disassociate from the outside world including family networks. This eventually leads to fractured relationships and difficulty re-entering society. The women interviewed all suffered several collateral consequences from their imprisonment. Some of these consequences appeared while they were incarcerated, while others manifested after they were released.

Section 1: Collateral Consequences of Imprisonment

Theme 1: In-House Victimization

Behind the prison walls, individuals are exposed to dehumanizing and degrading treatment. The conditions of imprisonment can result in psychological stressors caused by an individual's attempt to preserve a sense of self-worth. There are also severe consequences for those who appear weak and rewards for those who successfully become institutionalized despite victimization by the state, correctional officers, and other prisoners (Haney 2012; 6). Haney (2012) also describes how prisoners attempt to adjust to the conditions of confinement. This is referred to as *prisonization*, which is the socialization into prison. Lockdown may further exacerbate an individual's victimization while also creating an environment where individuals are deterred from seeking help, treatment, and counseling on the inside and upon release. Issac Lockhart & Williams (2001) have examined Black women's exposure to violence inside the prison walls referred to as "in house violence." They state (2001:130).

Prison abuse is defined as "any forceful or intimidating behavior (e.g., pressure, threats, and other actions and communications) perpetrated by one or more correctional

employees and/ or inmates. This definition includes pushing, shoving, maiming, forceful, rape, murder, or stabbing, etc.d

Furthermore, Black women are more likely to be incarcerated for longer periods of time than their counterparts and this extended time frame of confinement makes them more susceptible to in-house violence. Below are several interviewee accounts of the conditions they face while incarcerated (Lockhart & Williams 2001:147).

Most of the interviewee's chose to share some of their experiences while they were incarcerated. Among all the participants, Chaplain Jack was incarcerated for the longest. When she was asked about her time incarcerated for eight years, she shared that she had a particularly difficult time getting adjusted, because she was always getting into trouble in the beginning for sneaking out of her cell to meet up with a woman that later became her girlfriend while in prison.

She also spoke about her experiences with correctional officers (CO) and even other inmates. She explained how she avoided the insidious advances from CO's by regularly writing them up. For instance, she exclaimed, "There were a couple of CO I had to write up because they were harassing me for one reason or another." Issac and Lockhart (2001) indicate that for women who try to disclose mistreatment from correctional officers, often results in disciplinary action. This did not seem to be Chaplain Jack's case, So, I wanted to know how she avoided at disciplinary action for writing up and abusive CO and if anything was resolved. She explained to me that there was this one officer who was an ex-gang member that just kept singling her out. When she went to write him up, another higher commanding CO pulled her into his office and said, "I guarantee you if you drop this, I will make sure that he doesn't bother you anymore. I will make sure of it, and I will make sure that every officer knows that he is not to bother you."

As a result, she rescinded her allegations against the officer. She explained that she felt relieved that the commanding officer kept his word.

Moreover, Michelle also spoke about the degrading treatment that she witnessed other's experience at the hands of the CO. She explained,

I mean...it's not really... they didn't never come off on me of course...I'm light skin. So they probably thinking I'm half black and half white. So, I never really had to encounter racism like ever because like I said, I'm light skin. I watched how they treated other Black people and like they would talk to them rude and ruthless you know! It's like... I don't know if they were talking to them that way because of the way those people presented themselves... or if that's the way those people were treated like that because that's just the way they presented themselves. But I never really had to deal... had to deal with that because I didn't come off as rude or I wasn't disrespectful. I'm here to do my god damn time and get out of yalls way

Michelle believed that her skin color allowed her to escape the guard's advances. While she witnessed women with darker complexions experience abuse from the guards, she couldn't determine whether it was from the women's actions or if the guards truly were racist. Michelle believed that she had avoided mistreatment from the guards because she never appeared to be disrespectful or cause problems. The dynamic of colorism that Michelle is speaking to is interesting and should be explored further in the literature on race and incarceration. Both Chaplain Jack and Michelle avoided COs by falling in line and not causing problems despite witnessing others victimized. In many ways, it is how they protected themselves while on the inside and avoided trouble.

While several participants revealed instances of in-house violence, June talked considerably about her time in multiple jails and prisons across the United States. She recalled,

The things I saw there was just horrendous. It was horrendous. It was...it was bad...really bad. Even for me and I am one... who knows how to get along and how to talk and what to say. But even then, that was bad for me. When you could be standing in line and the next thing you know was something hit the floor like a bowling ball, but it was a person's head because you have a guard that had just taken these women down who was standing up. Just grabbed her by the head and slammed her down. To the core, I was sick!

Like Chaplain Jack and Michelle, June found that she escaped physical violence for the most part because she was able to keep her head down. However, as she explained, even for her, an individual with a long history of arrest, it was difficult to witness.

Theme 2: Medical Neglect while Incarcerated

Inadequate medical care can exacerbate women's preexisting health conditions before their imprisonment (Wooldridge and Steiner 2016). Researchers have found that incarcerated women are two to three times more likely to test positive for HIV, with 53% of individuals expressed having complications with their menstrual cycles, and 33% suffering from depression and suicidal thoughts (Eliason, Taylor, And Williams 2004). Several of the women interviewed spoke about their lack of access to adequate medical care while in prison. Chaplain Jack shared that she was given the wrong medication when she was incarcerated. While in prison, she

described the medical care as very “shoddy” or appearing not to be right. She also said that prisons also could stand to be investigated.

In another interview, Michelle spoke about the medical neglect that she experienced while in prison. She said that there were long wait times to see doctors and to get care. For instance,

You can fill out a report...to see a doctor or whatever and however long it takes them to...it could literally take them up to five days if your situation was important of whatever...all the way to 60 days till you saw a doctor.

Michelle had had to prove that she was unable to climb up on her top bunk because of a previously leg injury. To switch her bunk from the top to the bottom, she had to get medical approval which was a thirty-day process. Frustratingly she explained, “I was sleeping on the floor because I literally couldn’t climb up on the top bunk. And with me sleeping on the floor that means that my head was either by the toilet or the sink.”

Many of the women also shared that they were not given sufficient feminine health care products. Rebecca said,

I had on my menstruation while I was in there. I told the guard that I needed a tampon. Boy, she got it whenever she wanted to. I was afraid to ask for them...but you only got them once a month. When you did your intake at the prison.

The impact of confinement on women’s health has become a topic of interest, especially since COVID- 19. Researchers find that women’s healthcare in prison is often compromised by punitive security measures and the stigma attached to incarceration. May was incarcerated at the

beginning of the pandemic and she was released after growing concern over prison conditions and the spread of the virus. I asked May several questions about her time incarcerated at the start of the pandemic. She spoke about several restrictions that were implemented while she was at a federal work camp which included, the inability to regularly shower, the lack of COVID-19 testing and isolation beds, and the overall fear that many of the women had because of restrictions on television. May said,

Your limited in the television that you can watch anyway. So, you're watching the news because one channel had to be on the news... so you're watching the news and the numbers are going up and up and your like there is no way you're going to survive. And if your obese or you have asthma any of that... and the medical facility is not...it's just not enough... they got band-aids or something... even one of the doctors or PA had on ankle monitors because she got caught running a meth lab or something

May also said that part of the lock-down restrictions was that individuals were limited in the number of showers that they were allowed to take throughout the week. She explained that people were risking early release just to take showers.

We couldn't take showers but only Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays and through designated times. So, people was getting in trouble for sneaking in the shower to take a shower because you can't tell women...it's like people on their cycle and everything. So, some people weren't able to go home early because they sneaked and took a shower.

As previously described, not only did the women also experience medical neglect but they also experienced the loss of time with their loved ones. The interviewees' revealed that each woman's

incarceration was also experienced by their loved ones. This became especially apparent when they returned home from prison and will be discussed in the section below.

Theme 3: Incarceration and Post Incarceration Experiences with Loved Ones

There are very few studies that explore the challenges of motherhood that incarcerated Black mothers face while incarcerated and post-release. As previously stated, incarceration is a gendered phenomenon as are the experiences, expectations, and social norms surrounding parenting in general, and specifically in the context of incarceration. Robert (1993) indicates that these experiences can also differ interactionally as formerly incarcerated Black women face additional obstacles resuming maternal responsibilities after their incarceration. In a study conducted by Mitchell and Davis (2019) five formerly incarcerated women in a large urban area in Texas were interviewed and recruited through a nonprofit organization. They found that among the interviewed, safety, education, and housing were some of the challenges and concerns that the women expressed. Many of the women worried that they would not be able to protect their children from neighborhood violence. They also emphasized their children's education and the importance of their children graduating high school. Mitchell and Davis (2019) contend that their concerns stemmed from their perceptions of their shortcomings and, in part, the lack of opportunities they had growing up. Incarcerated mothers in the study also expressed that they were concerned over the safety of their neighborhood. Their concern was often focused on their sons' welfare and that they hoped their sons would not be susceptible to neighborhood drugs and violence. Moreover, women raising their sons in disadvantaged communities feared that their sons would be stereotyped as criminals or future criminals. This created another layer of stress and strain on some of the mothers (Alexander 2020). For many mothers, being hypervigilant meant protecting their children from the crime, drugs, and violence in their environment.

Many of the participants spoke about missing time with their children and loved ones while incarcerated. For Autumn, it was the time that she missed with her boys.

Just the time I could have spent with my kids. It could have been a little bit better. Which it is! But they ain't no bad kids or nothing. Both of them graduated. This last one he is going to graduate but it is just I could have done more time with them than I did and with family that really cared. You know the ones that don't care they ain't around now.

When asked about her relationship with her kids when she returned home, Autumn said,

It was good. They were glad I was home. When they were staying with my mom it was rocky because when I got home, she was expecting me to just jump in and start doing everything in the book. She had a car and wanted me to walk. So I did what I could.

Autumn felt pressured by her mother to immediately pick up raising her kids even though she didn't have the proper resources. She felt that her mother just didn't understand how challenging it was to reconnect with her children, find employment, and eventually housing. Moreover, she felt that her mother had made it difficult for her because she had kicked her out of the house when she was released. For almost a year, Autumn was homeless and would sleep in parks. Transportation also appeared to be a significant problem for Autumn. For example, not having a car limited the types of jobs she could get. It also made it difficult for her to bring home groceries for her children.

Furthermore, Michelle in her interview reported feeling shame and guilt because of her incarceration. When she realized that she would be arrested, she told her daughters that she was going off to college. Her oldest daughter later learned that she was in prison. Michelle said that

she struggled with continuing to portray herself in a positive light to her daughters, but she feared that her daughters would follow the same path as her.

I felt bad because like... I mean...no parent wants to tell their kid that they in jail. I mean not a good parent anyway. I felt some parents don't care and they just... I...not me. I want my kids to always think the best of me. I don't want them to ever think that I was some kind of monster or criminal. So, umm I was kind of like disappointed when she found out. I think I wanted my daughter to think that going to jail was horrible and you never have to encounter certain things and at that point, it's not like I could portray that image to her anymore because I have been jailed.

Michelle also lost custody of her two daughters while she was incarcerated. She has since struggled to regain custody. She explained,

At this point, I am trying to get custody of my kids back and the judge her issue is that I'm not supposed to be around anybody but my own kids. How am I supposed to take care of my own child if I can't even have their friends at my house? Or I can't even take them to McDonald's and let them play in the playhouse because I'm a registered sex offender.

When asked about her time in prison in the middle of COVID, May conveyed the frustration that several of the other inmates felt when visitations with loved ones were stopped. She said that even before COVID-19, it was difficult for women inmates because they were often the caretakers of children and older family members.

IT WAS HELL....IT WAS HELL! So, for one thing being in a women's prison is unfair because women typically have families you know? Children or parents that you take care of. So, too be the person that is providing for somebody and then they take you away from the family...because you don't have time to find somebody to take care of your kids and you're trying to call every day and check up on them, but you can't.

She then went on to explain,

And you have to pay for the phone, or you have to pay for your email by the minute. You couldn't go to work to make money, but you see you had to tell your family that you needed some money but if you can't use the phone, your family won't send you money and then you can't buy anything off commissary like soap.

The participant's revealed that their incarceration not only impacted them but also their loved ones. For some, it can be extremely difficult to maintain relationships with their children after their released.

Theme 4: Employment Opportunities, Parole and Stigma

All the interviewees except Rebecca shared that they found it difficult to find employment after their time in prison. Again, Rebecca spent the shortest amount of time in jail after she was found not guilty. She was able to keep her job even in the midst of the allegation against her. Overall, the women arrested on federal charges seemed to have the most challenging time finding employment after prison. For instance, Chaplain Jack spent five years learning to become a welder and eventually became certified. However, when she was released, she stated that she couldn't find a job because of her record.

So, the thing is any union job is basically...its very closed... union jobs. You have to know somebody. You're family member or somebody. It was very insular. So, to add to the gender biases and racial bias. It's not a lot. There aren't a lot of black welders. I mean I don't know what the numbers are now or back then. So, when I got certified, the person that ran the class retired from being a welder and he started teaching at the prison.”

Individuals like Chaplain Jack, who have sentences that are longer than a year are generally assigned to jobs while incarcerated. Recall that Chaplain Jack was imprisoned for eight years, in that time she took on welding and became good at it. When she left prison, she was under the assumption that she would be able to obtain a job as a welder. However, as she explained to me, she found it very challenging to find a job because the field primarily consists of white men. Eventually, she was hired as a welder, but she was paid under the table significantly lower because of her criminal background. She quit after realizing her employer was taking all the credit for her work.

May also spoke about the challenges she experienced getting a job after being incarcerated. Eventually, she opened her own business and started a podcast. She said,

But employment? I did go back to work at this coffee shop...but my manager...see when she ran my background check nothing came up because it is a federal charge, and they don't do a federal background check. But because she was so afraid that somebody was going to find out because she knew that I had been to prison... so she knew... she was nervous that I was at work with an ankle monitor and they were going to see, and somebody was going to report it to corporate.”

May, like Chaplain Jack, also faced barriers to employment. For May, her criminal background prevented her from being employed. For June, she saw her gender, race, and incarceration history preventing her from receiving adequate payment from her employer. After trying to find employment, both women became advocacy workers, which will be discussed in the next section.

Michelle also faced similar barriers to finding employment. However, as a registered sex offender she had a very different set of obstacles to overcome. She explained that having to register as a sex offender was challenging. Most of her frustration stemmed from the fact that she was manipulated by her boyfriend and that she didn't commit the crime that she was arrested for. She felt that people just assumed they knew what happened in her case and that they didn't acknowledge that a person could be on the sex offender registry for various reasons that didn't include sexually abusing a child. For instance, she said,

Umm, basically it's a lot! I mean first of all it is embarrassing to have to tell anybody that I am a registered sex offender because they first thought that pops in anybody head is... who did you touch or what did you do...it is never ...oh you didn't know the girl was underage...oh you just so happened to get put in the situation. No it's always... Oh you're a pedophile or oh you nasty. You get put in a category and it's like the category is determines a lot.

She then said,

I have literally tried to get so many jobs. I'm talking about good-paying jobs and these people deny it because they don't want to have to explain to anybody that this girl right

here is a registered sex offender even though she didn't touch anybody...this is our employee. And for me...I can't...I can't... I can't even just get an apartment just anywhere. I have to be 1000 ft away from a school or daycare. I live in city limits...so do you know how...like there is a school and daycare on every block. Light it's really really hard. It was hard for me to find a place or anybody that would rent to me.

Michelle also spoke about the challenges that she faced trying to find housing. She explained that she consistently must check in with her PO and register the places where she is currently living even if she is staying with a friend.

Section 2: Coping After Incarceration

In this study, there were very few participants that returned to prison after they were released for the charges that they mentioned. However, as previously stated, several of the women's biographies reveal a serious of arrest over the course of their lives. As predicted, the women with high and moderate involvement in the CJS had several instances in which they recidivate and were incarcerated. The participants were asked if they adopted any coping mechanisms while incarcerated. While some explained that they didn't, a few shared that programs such as mother-read, financial literacy classes choir, arts and crafts, and working helped them pass the time. For example, Autumn who had medium involvement in the CJS was ordered by an attorney to attend both parenting and financial literacy classes. I asked if she felt that the classes benefited her and helped her stay out of prison. She replied that only the financial literacy class was beneficial because now she can budget her money and she has even taught others budgeting skills. While incarcerated, Michelle was able to use creativity to make extra money. She made cards for the other inmates to send to their children on holidays.

Outside of prison, religion and advocacy work seemed to keep Chaplain Jack and June, both women who were incarcerated because of their addiction and trauma, from returning to prison. Now, both women work with other individuals affected by substance abuse and imprisonment. For them, advocacy work and religion became a coping mechanism to the trauma they experienced as children and while incarcerated. To explain further, Chaplain Jack didn't share whether she attended a substance abuse program like June. However, she did share that she continued to relapse on several occasions after she was released. It wasn't until almost dying in a car accident that she turned to religion and ministry:

So, I ended up accepting the call to ordained ministry and I created a program in my spirituality and social change class that deals with restorative justice on an interpersonal level. Basically, during my seminary years, what I wrote about was my own experience in trying to heal from my own life.

June was excited to share her pathway into advocacy work. She explained that she worked several jobs while in prison because she knew the challenges she was going to face when she was released. While in prison, she spent most of time teaching parenting classes, planning job fairs, and helping the other inmates with their resumes.

One of the things that I started doing was preparing packets for women that were going to their perspective cities and states. So, I would make these packets and I would also make their... resumes for them. I developed as I started learning.

When June was released from prison, she immediately went to a halfway house, where she was approached by a woman involved in advocacy work. The woman later became her mentor. June

explained that it was through advocacy work and speaking at conventions about her experiences that she was able to find her voice.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

This study was designed to examine the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated Black women. The study draws upon several perspectives in the criminological literature, especially Black Feminist Criminology (BFC), Intersectionality, Strain Theory, and the Pathways Perspective. The main findings of this study do indeed relate to many of the arguments, assumption, concepts, and logic of these scholarly perspectives. In this way and others, the literature guiding this study is also a critical part of interpreting the interview data. As an exploratory qualitative study, no attempt is made to test or adjudicate the veracity of the theories and concepts. Nor is the data generalizable. Rather, the literature is more like a set of building blocks that guided the empirical investigation, and then the data are used to revisit the literature. Several findings of this study, reported in the previous two Chapters, are indeed interpretable using these literatures. Of particular salience are the findings related to difficult parental relationships, victimization, substance abuse, bullying, self-identity, and self-esteem. Indeed, parental relationships, or the absence of parental bonds, influenced how the women viewed themselves and their childhood. This was most prevalent for the interviewees in their relationship with their mother as there were some expectations that mothers should provide better stability and more nurturing. Absent mother-figures and led to feelings of self-doubt, uncertainty, and invalidation for the interviewees as children and even into adulthood. Furthermore, in the case where mothers were substance users, these feelings seemed heightened. Several of the women reported feeling that if they had had more present positive parental figures and guidance, they would have had overall better childhoods, and later in life would have made better choices in intimate partners and peer relationships.

Manipulation as a pathway to CJS appeared for almost half of the participants. For example, Michelle was “set up” and influenced by her boyfriend and May’s experienced a similar situation with her business partner. For both women, the introduction of negative stimuli through their relationships seemed to entrap them in the CJS despite not “actively” participating in crime. To them, in part, removing what could have been “positive stimuli” in a parental figure appeared to have led them to negative relationships absent of positive coping mechanisms. As Agnew and Broidy (2006) have asserted, women may respond to strain through emotions and indeed several women in this study expressed feelings of guilt and shame over their victimization and choices. Interviewees routinely reported that they should have known better, despite adverse childhood experiences such as neglectful parents and sexual trauma and victimization.

Victimization, especially in the forms of intimate partner violence and childhood sexual trauma appeared in almost all the interviewee’s biographies. Agnew (2001) argues that criminal victimization is one type of strain that is conducive to crime and CJS involvement. The participants in this study all experienced different degrees of sexual trauma. For example, Rebecca shared that she was groped by an older man in her neighborhood as a young girl. June also experienced a series of instances of sexual victimization, including childhood sexual abuse and intimate partner violence. Sexual victimization is often associated with negative emotions such as depression, anger, and negative coping behaviors such as alcohol and drug use. Jang and Johnson (2003) contend that for women, negative coping mechanisms are often self-directed which was the case for participants in this study. Sexual victimization and assault were also linked to their experiences of gendered- racism. For example, when June was asked if she felt comfortable calling the police after an altercation with her ex-husband. She exclaimed that she had called the police, but officers refused to provide her with assistance and instead referred to

her as a career criminal. Hillary Potter (2006:114) has written extensively about the experiences of Black women and IPV. She contends,

Based on socially constructed perceptions of Black women, BFC scrutinizes how stereotypical images of these women affect the ways in which others respond to them. Poor responses by social services professionals and crime-processing agents to Black women's interpersonal victimization crisis can be considered under the auspices of this framework. Social services used by domestic violence victims in their process of leaving abusive relationships includes medical assistance, battered women's shelters, and therapeutic agents. It is regrettable that African American women are often reluctant to seek assistance via these opportunities. The barrier to using these sources may be in relation to not only the short supply of batter women's shelters and therapeutic resources in Black communities or know to the Black community but also in the ability and lack of trust in those working in the helping professions who are not able to deliver adequate culturally competent services to African American women who have suffered abuse from the intimate partner.

Overall, Black Feminist Criminology/ Intersectionality and Pathways Perspective were incredibly helpful in situating the current study's findings with the literature on Black Women's experiences of victimization (i.e., childhood abuse, intimate partner violence, structural violence, and in house violence).

For both Chaplain Jack and June, substance abuse became a way to cope with various forms of victimization. Chaplain Jack and June both experienced sexual abuse as children from a close family member over a period of several years. However, their addiction did not start

directly after these experiences. Both women were introduced to alcohol and drug use through their thrill-seeking, curiosity, and peers. Later their drug use became an addiction which caused more strain, thus leading to further destructive behavior and involvement in the CJS. It can also be assumed that they turned to alcohol and drug use a way to forget their past experiences of trauma. To provide a further explanation, “One explanation for the relationship between sexual abuse and substance use is that self-medicating with substances provides some relief to the pain of sharp memories and of life difficulties” (Johnson and Young 2002:3).

While there are pathways to the women’s involvement in the CJS, the findings also revealed elements of colorism within the participant’s biographies. For example, Chaplain Jack felt bullied by her peers that were Black. As a child and a teenager, she felt “othered,” which she explains led her to hang out with her white peers. Michelle was also bullied by her peers who were Black because she had lighter skin and was bi-racial. Lastly, June shared that her mother would often criticize her for having a lighter skin tone than the rest of the family. This is an important finding which should be explored further in future research because most criminological scholarship focuses on the majority racial group’s maltreatment of racial and ethnic minorities. Conceptual frameworks and perspectives such as Black Feminism, Black Feminist Criminology, Intersectionality, and Critical Race Theory seemed to shed the most insight on colorism. Intersectionality, however provided the most salience because race/ethnicity, gender identity, skin tone, and class were able to be examined further.

This study also captured the experiences of what it was like for women to be incarcerated amid a global pandemic. One interviewee, May shared that while incarcerated she experienced medical neglect, isolation, and victimization as a result of imposed stricter health guidelines in

prison. Even though inmates like May were released early to prevent the spread of COVID, she still suffered the collateral consequences from her incarceration. Future researchers should examine these experiences further in longitudinal studies.

As stated, throughout the study several theoretical frameworks were used to situate the findings from the current study with the literature. These conceptual frameworks helped to guide several aspects of the study including the methodological approach used. Overall, each framework helped to speak to the women's experiences in varied ways. For instance, Black Feminist Criminology proved to be a viable framework to examine experiences of gendered racism among the participants involved in the CJS. This framework helped to better examine and understand the connection between structural violence and Black women's over involvement in the CJS. It also helped to speak to the women's experiences of personal victimization (Richie 2018, Potter 2006; Roberts 2009). General Strain Theory (GST), also proved to be a significant framework to understand women's involvement in the CJS. It also was used to examine how women cope with strain which adversely resulted in substance abuse and toxic relationships. Lastly, Pathways Perspective (PT) helped to provide context the internal and external factors involved in the women's pathway to the CJS. Future studies should continue to examine whether there are other theories and frameworks that could be used to understand Black women's involvement in the CJS. Combined, the conceptual and theoretical frameworks above provided a greater understanding to the lived experiences of Black women and their involvement in the CJS.

This study also had several limitations (1) a small sample size, (2) a wide variety of interview topics, and (3) challenges capturing experiences of gendered racism. Additionally, asking people to reflect on experiences that occurred decades ago, which are generally

emotionally sensitive, may have affected the validity of the data. Also, some women in this study did not serve very long sentences and thus their experiences when incarcerated may be very different from those who serve longer sentences. Indeed, while life-history interviews often use a small population size, a greater sample size would have likely provided variation in age, crime committed, and those with significantly longer sentences. In this study, participants did not vary in age. For the most part, they were all between the age of 40-65. Only one participant, Michelle, did not fall into this age range as she was 26 years old at the time of her interview. The demographic location of the participants also influenced the findings of this study. The participants were generally recruited in North Carolina; however, recruitment flyers were distributed across the country and interviews were held over the phone. This method did gain the interest of one participant who currently lived in California and another participant who grew up in Illinois but currently lives in North Carolina. These factors, among others, provided a smaller sample size and therefore this study is not generalizable to the population. However, the smaller sample size did allow for the research questions to be addressed in-depth and allowed time for the findings to emerge from comprehensive interviews with the participants.

Another limitation is that a wide variety of interview questions were asked of each participant. While seemingly conducive to gathering more data for analysis, for several of the interviews, it became a challenge to address all the topics thoroughly. While interviewing the participants, it became apparent that there seemed to be a few topics that needed more attention than others. While the semi-structured interview process allowed for the fluidity of the interview process, future studies might want to be more selective with interview questions or schedule many more interview sessions.

Another challenge was ultimately capturing experiences of structural “gendered-racism” from such a small sample size, as discussed in the previous sections. For some participants, the trauma might be so embedded that it might be challenging to notice instances of structural racism. Future researchers might want to see if providing the interviewees with examples of definitions of the term might prove to be helpful. While this study had several limitations, the women’s experiences relate and in some cases support many of the findings in the literature on the realities of growing up as a Black woman. Several of the women experienced dehumanization while incarcerated in terms of the medical neglect they experienced and in how they were treated by correctional staff. Many women also had difficulty adjusting when they were released, such as finding employment, overcoming stigma, and reconnecting with loved ones.

I hope this study engages activists and scholars to continue to fight against structural and systemic racism and to also overturn historical forces of gendered racism. As found in this study, several of the participants have serious histories of embedded trauma and scholarship should continue to examine trauma through an intersectional lens. As June stated in her interview, treating trauma is secondary to treating addiction. Policy makers should consider how trauma impacts individuals’ pathways to the CJS. Furthermore, I hope this study helps to challenged notions of victims and offenders, especially in the case of Black women in the CJS system.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FACT SHEET

IRB Information Sheet

Project Title: Life Histories of Formerly Incarcerated Black Women

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Kelly Childress and Dr. David Kauzlarich

Participant's Name:

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

What is the study about?

I am asking you to participate in this study because this study will examine the unique experiences of Black women that have served time in a federal and or state prison. In this study, personal and structural experiences will be examined as they relate to pathways to prison. Personal experiences may include parental and familial bonds, educational opportunities, and neighborhood context. Structural conditions may include perceptions of unjust sentencing, racial biases, and residing in structurally disadvantaged communities. This study encourages you to share your story as well as your unique experiences. As a participant, you will be asked to take part in at most two interviews (in-person, video conferencing, and or telephone). These interviews will last between 2-3 hours and will include multiple built in breaks. Some of the life experiences that you may be asked to reflect on might include events that occurred during your childhood, your time spent incarcerated, and your time post-release. You will be asked also if you would be willing to share some of the events leading up to your conviction as well as the experiences that you had while in prison. Lastly, you will be asked about your life post-release. In each of these experiences, you may be asked to reflect on your identity as a Black woman and how your identity may or may not have impacted your life.

Studies such as this can offer activists as well as criminal justice reformers a holistic understanding of the impact of gendered racism in the United States. As a result of this study, I hope future research will begin to overturn these historical forces of gendered racism.

Is there any audio/video recording?

Yes. The interview will include an audio recording of your voice only. However, this audio recording will only be used to transcribe the interview with any identifiable information being redacted from the transcription. The audio recording device will be placed in a password protected safe when not in use.

Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording as described below

What are the risks to me?

The nature of this study is not to cause any participant undue stress or emotional harm. As a result, you are encouraged to take as many breaks during the interview as you feel necessary. You are not required under any circumstance to reveal any information that may incriminate you or others or that you are uncomfortable sharing. This study will ask you to reveal personal information regarding life events and experiences. If any of the events or recollections of experiences during the interview become emotionally triggering, please make your interviewer aware.

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.”

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Kelly Childress (Principal Investigator) or Dr. David Kauzlarich (faculty advisor)

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns, or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at...

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

Participation in this study will not cost you anything. However, you will receive a \$50 visa gift card upon the completion of your interview.

How will you keep my information confidential?

Any data collected will be stored in a locked safe that only is accessible to the researchers of this study.

All data stored that is stored on a computer will be password protected and will not identify any participant by name when data is disseminated.

We will do everything possible to make sure that your information is kept confidential. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. We will insert measures to ensure confidentiality. Such measures include not asking for any identifying information, use of pseudonyms, deletion of audiotapes after transcription (if you share any identifying information in your interview the transcript will redact any identifiers), your data will be secured on a private and password protected computer, etc. Absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing.

Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording as described in this section.

Will my de-identified data be used in future studies?

Your de-identified data may be used in future studies. This data will be kept indefinitely and may be used for future research without your additional consent. All our participants' de-identified data will be kept indefinitely and will be posted to an online repository so other scientists can analyze the data and check our results.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data that has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What if I have questions?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

If you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact Kelly Childress (Principal Investigator) or Dr. David Kauzlarich (faculty advisor)

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

In an effort to protect your identity, I will not ask for written consent. However, verbal consent is needed to participate in this study. If you are willing to participate, please contact the research (via telephone) to confirm consent and to schedule an interview. You are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, in this study described to you by

By signing this consent form/completing this survey/activity (used for an IRB-approved waiver of signature) _____.

SEEKING PARTICIPANTS FOR A RESEARCH STUDY ABOUT BLACK WOMEN

Are you at least 18 years of age or older?
Do you identify as a African American and/or Black Women?
Have you spent time in a federal or state prison?
Are you willing to share you story?

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to participate in a 2-3 hour interview or teleconference about your life. You will be compensated for your time and will recieve a \$25-50 Visa Gift Card.

Interested in participating or have questions please contact

**[REDACTED] or
text "Yes" [REDACTED] number to**

This study is taking extra procautions to protect all participants. To remain anonymous please DO NOT use any personal information in the email or text message.



**SEEKING PARTICIPANTS
FOR A RESEARCH STUDY
ABOUT BLACK WOMEN**
Are you 18 years or older?
**Do you Identify as an African American
and/or Black women?**
**Have you spent time in a state or federal
prison?**

**Interested in participating or have
questions please contact
Kelly Childress at**
[REDACTED] or
text "Yes" with a contact number to
[REDACTED]



APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

<p>Researcher:</p>	<p>Hi, thank you for reaching out to me about participating in this study. I would like to begin by telling you a little bit about myself and the study. Do you have a moment?</p>
<p>Participant:</p>	<p>(If states, Yes)</p>
<p>Researcher: [GENERAL INFORMATION]</p>	<p>My name is Kelly Childress. I am a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro where I am completing my Master's in Sociology. I have been working on this project as a part of my thesis for about two years now and I am excited to be able to have the opportunity to sit down and speak with you. This study will be primarily focused on participants' life experiences from childhood to adulthood. Think of these as life history interviews. Several of the questions that will be asked will focus on particular aspects of your life such as relationships, neighborhoods and school experiences, employment opportunities, experiences in prison, and your experiences post-release. This interview will take 2-3 hours of your time with breaks built. However, you are welcome to take a break at any time. You may also be asked to participate in a follow-up interview at the end of this session. You will also receive a \$50 visa card for your time.</p> <p>It is important that your privacy is protected however, I can not fully guarantee it as a part of this study. There are several measures that will be taken to mitigate the risk to you as a participant. You will be given a pseudonym name that will be used throughout the study to protect your identity. This will be how you will be referred to in the study. As with any study, any identifiable information including names, addresses, or information you do not wish to share will be removed from the transcription of the study. If you have any questions or concerns about the type of information that will be used in this study please let me know.</p> <p>As a part of this study, you will not be required to sign a consent form to protect your anonymity. This study, however, does require your verbal consent. In a few minutes I will ask for your verbal consent. You agreeing today to participate is not a binding agreement but just a way for me to schedule a follow-up with you. I will also ask you for email addresses to send you a detailed consent form which you do need to sign. We will schedule a follow-up date for you to ask questions and or proceed with an interview. In proceeding with the interview, I will then at this time as for your verbal consent. At any time you may revoke this consent and all of your information will be removed from the study. Do you have any questions for me about the study of how your privacy will be protected if you were to participate?</p>

<p>Researcher: [PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS]</p>	<p>Next, I would like to ask you a couple of pre-interview questions. There are about seven pre-interview questions that check that you meet the following requirements for the study.</p> <p>Pre- Interview Questions</p> <p>Question 1: I would like to confirm that you are at least 18 years of age?</p> <p>Question 2: I would also like to confirm that you identify yourself as an African American and or Black woman?</p> <p>Question 3: For this study, I would like to know if you served time in a federal and or state prison? If so, for how long?</p> <p>Question 4: Do you currently live in North Carolina or around the Greensboro area?</p> <p>Questions 5: Are you currently on parole or required to attend any form of rehabilitation? If so, are there some restrictions that might infer with you participating in this study. This may include conditions of parole or probation. If any do arise please feel free to let me know while you are participating in this study.</p> <p>Questions 6: For this interview are you willing to be audio recorded?</p> <p>Question 7: Do you give verbal permission to participate in this study and acknowledge that you may revoke this permission at any time throughout the study?</p> <p>Are there any questions or concerns that you may have at this time? If not, we can go ahead and set up a time for an interview?</p>
<p>Researcher: [INTERVIEW SCHEDULING]</p>	<p>Due to COVID-19, are you willing to conduct an in-person interview by taking precautions by wearing masks and social distancing? If not, we could either set up an interview via teleconference or videoconference. For either, please provide me with a time and place that works best for you? If you decide that a telephone interview is best, could you please provide me with an email address that I could send you a copy of a consent form. You do not need to sign this consent form at this time.</p> <p>[Proceed with scheduling interview time and place]</p>

	<p>Is this number a good number to reach you at? Thank you for your time and I look forward to speaking with you on [date and time]. If any questions or concerns come up before our meeting please feel free to contact me at (# contact)</p>
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APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SCRIPT

<p>RESEARCHER:</p> <p>[VERBAL CONSENT]</p> <p>Estimated Time: 15- 20 mins</p>	<p>Hi, thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. Your time is greatly appreciated. We have discussed a little bit about the study in our last conversation. However, I am happy to go over that information with you again or answer any questions that you may have. If you don't have any questions or concerns, I have a consent form that includes information regarding this study. I will give you a moment to read over the consent form. If any questions come up please let me know.</p> <p>[After the time has been given to read over consent form]</p> <p>I am now going to ask for your verbal consent to participate in this study. This includes agreeing that you have had time to read over the consent form as well as that you agree to this interview being audiotaped.</p> <p>Do you agree to participate in this study? Do you agree to also be audiotaped only to transcribe the recording?</p>
	<p>(For participants that have already received a consent form via email I will ask if they have read the consent form and if they have any questions or concerns)</p>
<p>RESEARCHER:</p> <p>RECORDER ON</p>	<p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study to respect your time we are going to get started. At any time you may ask to take a break, or if a question is too prying you may let me know and we will move on. Again you are not required to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. If any of these questions are triggering, you may ask to stop the interview.</p> <p>I am now going to turn on the recorder and we will begin</p>
<p>RESEARCHER</p>	<p>We are going to start with some general questions and then move on to some questions about your childhood. If that is okay?</p>
<p>RESEARCHER</p> <p>[DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS]</p>	<p>[Proceeds with demographic questions]</p> <p>What is your age? Where did you grow up? What is your race/ ethnicity? What is the highest level of education you have completed?</p>

<p>Estimated Time: 15- 20 mins</p>	<p>What do you currently do for work? What were you convicted of? How much time did you serve and was it at a state or federal facility?</p>
<p>RESEARCHER Estimated time 5-10 mins RECORDER OFF</p>	<p>Built-in break</p>
<p>RESEARCHER [INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: CHILDHOOD] RECORDER ON Estimated Time:1 hour</p>	<p>Now we are going over some questions about your childhood</p> <p>Question 1: Could you tell me a little bit about your childhood and what you remember? When and where were you born? What were some of the memories that you have? This may include good and or bad memories, struggles that your family had, or general things you noticed about the people you grew up with?</p> <p>Probing Questions: Relationships</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Tell me about your parents. When and where were they born? What memories do you have of them? What did they do for work? b. How would you describe your parents? What were some of the personality and/ or emotional qualities? c. Were there any specific values, traditions, or beliefs that your parents passed down to you? d. How would you describe your relationship with your parents? e. Did you have a family member that you felt you had the strongest relationship with? <p>Question 2: If you grew up with siblings or extended family members what do you remember about them? What was your relationship with them?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Could you tell me a little bit more about your relationship with your mother? b. How would you describe the friendships that you had as a childhood? Did you have a friend that you would close with? What were some of the things you used to do as a child? c. Do you mind sharing with me a memory from your childhood that you remember positively and maybe a memory from your childhood that wasn't so great? <p>Neighborhood Questions</p>

	<p>Question 3: Could you describe your city or neighborhood to me? What were some of the important features that you remember? What were the people like in your neighborhood?</p> <p>a. What were the demographics of your neighborhood? Was your neighborhood multiethnic or predominantly one race, class, or socioeconomic status?</p> <p>b. What were some of the activities you remember occurring in your neighborhood? Was your neighborhood a tight-knit community or did it change at some point</p> <p>c. Was your neighborhood a place that you felt safe? If not, what might have been some of the problems that occurred in your neighborhood? Did these problems affect your family or the people around you? If so how...</p> <p>d. Did you move a lot as a family? If so, could you describe some of the neighborhoods that you lived in? Did these moves affect relationships in your life? If so, how did they affect those relationships?</p> <p>Education Questions</p> <p>Question 4:What level of education did you complete?</p> <p>a. What do you remember about attending school as a child? What about as a teenager?</p> <p>b. What are some of your best/ worst memories in school?</p> <p>c. Did you enjoy school? If so why or why not? Did your feelings about school change at some point? If so why or why not?</p> <p>d. What do you remember learning about yourself in school? Was there a specific moment in your life as a student that helped shape you as a person?</p> <p>e. Can you describe the relationships that you had at school with your peers or school staff?</p> <p>f. Was there a teacher or school staff member that you felt the most connected with or that encouraged you?</p> <p>g. Was there an experience that you had at school that you felt you were being treated differently than your peers?</p> <p>h. Do you feel as though racial and gender discrimination impacted your experiences as a student? Would you mind sharing with me that experience?</p> <p>i. Did you ever consider dropping out of school? Why or Why not?</p>
<p>RESEARCHER Estimated time 5-10 mins</p> <p>RECORDER OFF</p>	<p>Built-in break</p>

<p>RESEARCHER</p> <p>[INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: ADULTHOOD]</p> <p>Estimated Time: 30 mins</p> <p>RECORDER ON</p>	<p>We are now going to move into questions that ask you about your adulthood experiences? Are you okay continuing?</p> <p>[Participant 'yes]</p> <p>Question 1: Before your sentence, were you married? If so, could you tell me a little bit about that relationship? Maybe how you met and maybe a little bit about this relationship if you don't mind sharing?</p> <p>a. What emotions does this relationship carry?</p> <p>b. Do you have children? What was your relationship like with them before you went to prison?</p> <p>c. How were your children cared for while you were serving your sentence?</p> <p>Question 2: What did you want to be growing up? Did you accomplish this goal? If not, what some of the barriers that you faced that you felt made it difficult?</p> <p>a. What were some of the types of jobs that you had before your sentence? Did you find it difficult to obtain these jobs? Why or why not?</p> <p>b. How did you end up in the type of work you do or did?</p> <p>c. Did the employment that you had at this time in your life impact the relationships that you had?</p> <p>d. Were you ever stressed about providing for your family whether it be financial or emotional? If so, do you feel as though this affected your health emotionally and or physically?</p> <p>Gendered Racism Questions</p> <p>Question 3: Do you think certain stressors are associated with being African American/ Black? Have these experiences impacted you or the people around you? Do you think that played a significant role in your experiences?</p> <p>Question 4: Do you think certain stressors are associated with being a woman? Have these experiences impacted you or the people around you? Do you think that played a significant role in experiences?</p> <p>a. Have you had to deal with discrimination or prejudice because of your race or gender? In what circumstances?</p>
<p>RESEARCHER</p> <p>Estimated time 5-10 mins</p> <p>RECORDER OFF</p>	<p>Built-in break</p>

<p>RESEARCHER</p> <p>[INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: PRISON EXPERIENCES]</p> <p>RECORDER ON</p> <p>Estimated time: 1-1 ½ hours.</p>	<p>We are now moving into the portion of the study that will ask about your experiences in prison. At any time you may ask to take a break, or if a question is too prying you may let me know and we will move on. Again you are not required to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. If any of these questions are triggering for you may ask to stop the interview. If there is something you wish not to have recorded you may ask to have the recorder turned off. I also have several organizations that I can also refer you to in the case that you may need to speak with someone.</p> <p>Are you okay with continuing?</p> <p>[Participant responds “yes”]</p>
	<p>Experience with the Criminal justice system</p> <p>Question 1: Was this your first arrest? If not, were you arrested as a juvenile? What was that experience like?</p> <p>a. Would you be willing to share the circumstances around your arrest(s)?</p> <p>b. At the time of committing your offense did you feel distressed by any circumstances occurring in your life at the time? Whether this be a relationship, financial needs, or an emotional feeling? Could you tell me more?</p> <p>Question 2: Could you describe the process you went through while you were being arrested?</p> <p>a. Can you describe your experience with the police officers and the intake process that you went through? More specifically, how were you treated by police officers at the time of your arrest? Did this affect your experience while in prison? Did this experience affect how you approached other officers and inmates?</p> <p>b. Were you allowed to tell your side of the events that occurred?</p> <p>Question 3: Would mind sharing your experiences in prison? What were some of your daily routines? What were some of the relationships that you had? If any? Were you a part of any rehabilitation program? Did you have family visits? How often?</p> <p>a. Did you experience any medical situations that were neglected due to your imprisonment?</p> <p>b. Did you work while in prison? If so, what did you do and what were your responsibilities? How was it viewed by other prisoners?</p> <p>c. Do you believe race played a role in your arrest or your experiences in prison? If so, how?</p>

	<p>d. Did you have any coping strategies that you had while in prison? What were these strategies and how effective were they? Ie, Spirituality, writing letters...</p> <p>Question 4: What did you gain or lose from your time spent in prison? Was it difficult to maintain a relationship with your partner, children, and family members? How did these relationships shift while you were in prison?</p>
<p>RESEARCHER Estimated time 5-10 mins</p> <p>RECORDER OFF</p>	<p>Built-in break</p>
<p>RESEARCHER</p> <p>[INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: PRISON EXPERIENCES]</p> <p>Estimated time: 30-45 mins</p> <p>RECORDER ON</p>	<p>Question 1: How did you feel after you were released?</p> <p>a. Was it difficult to reconnect with friends and family members? If so, how? What about reconnecting with your children?</p> <p>b. Did you feel safe returning to your neighborhood?</p> <p>c. Were you on parole, if so what were some of the restrictions that you had while on parole? Did these restrictions help or hinder you in any way?</p> <p>d. Did you find anything difficult after your release? Ie, renew a license, employment, reconnect with friends, GED, etc</p> <p>e. Was it hard to find a job post-release because of your charges? What perceptions do you think people had of you when applying to specific places of employment?</p> <p>f. Did you experience homelessness at any point during your re-entry process? Were you able to get access to public housing and receive public assistance?</p> <p>g. How has prison changed you?</p> <p>h. Did religion or spirituality play a role in your life? If so, How?</p> <p>i. What events or experiences from your past played a role in the choices that you have made?</p> <p>j. Reflecting on all the topics that we have discussed do you think that there is one particular moment, experience, or time frame that contributes to being incarcerated?</p>
<p>RESEARCHER</p>	<p>Are there any other questions that you think might be important to this study that I did not ask?</p>
<p>RESEARCHER</p> <p>RECORDER OFF</p>	<p>Thank you for participating in this study. I have a couple of short follow up questions that I would like to ask you.</p> <p>1. Would you be open to a follow-up interview if need?</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none">2. Would you like to be notified when the final transcription is complete?3. Would you be willing to pass the word along about this study to others who might be willing to participate? Do you also happen to know of any organizations that might be willing to agree to participate? [If agreed, I will give a couple of flyer to participant]1. I have compiled a list of organizations for participants that provide resources to people in the community would you like a list of these organizations for yourself or to give to others? [If participate is on a teleconference this will be emailed to them] <p>If any questions or concerns arise after this study please feel free to contact me.</p> <p>Thank you for your participation in this study.</p> <p>[Participant receives gift card]</p>
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