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A NARRATIVE STUDY: UNDERSTANDING THE INTERSECTIONS OF RACE, CLASS,  
GENDER, AND SEXUALITY IN THE PATHWAYS TO CRIME AND INCARCERATION  
IN AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S LIVES

by

RACHELLE STEWART

Under the Direction of Maurice Hobson, PhD

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality in African American women's lives and the way public policy intervenes in their pathways to crime and incarceration, by way of personal life histories. By exploring their personal life narratives allows for finding a voice that can express a self-defined black woman's standpoint. Black women's narratives offer a unique insight into interlocking patterns of oppression that contribute to their incarceration, and how discrimination based on race, gender, and sexuality extends into prison. Through the collection of five in-depth interviews, I examined how certain themes and how the intersection of social and structural factors told through their very own stories influences their criminal decision-making. Using a Black Feminist Thought framework is essential to capture black women's experiences as both offenders and women who live through the collateral consequences of mass incarceration.

INDEX WORDS: Black, African-American, Women, Incarceration, Crime, Intersectionality, Race, Class, Gender, Sexuality, Mass Incarceration

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RACHELLE STEWART

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2018

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2018

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IN AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S LIVES

by

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Georgia State University

May 2018

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to all black women who have been through the justice system. Most importantly the study is dedicated to the two women who took the time out to participate in the study and open up and share their stories for the purpose of my research. May this work open discussions between scholar and activist communities.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

Crime continues to be a popular topic when it comes to the Black community. Societal factors such as economic disadvantages, racial segregation, and racial perceptions have placed a higher view on the Black community when thinking of crime. In the context of Black women and their involvement in criminal offenses the rise in their incarceration rates presents a gap in the research to explore. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, a proliferation of punitive crime control legislation, led the U.S. to have the highest rate of female incarceration in the entire world (Skiffer, 2009, p. 5). Incarceration has become one of the social institutions shaping black women's experience. Mass incarceration and its lasting effects has become part of the socialization process. Although there has been much research and examination of criminal activity for the Black community, the lack of information to show that rates of Black female incarceration in state prisons is rising is a concern. Scholars such as Byrne and Trew (2008) examined several structural factors i.e. race, poverty, or social welfare that can lead to and contribute to criminal activity amongst Black women. However, in addition to the disadvantages and social impacts there are personal individual life experiences and specific situations in the life of African American women that also contribute to criminal activity, and this is an aspect to further explore.

This study argues that understanding the intersections, by way of personal life histories, of race, class, gender, and sexuality in African American women's lives and the way public policy intervenes in their pathways to crime and incarceration, allows for an overarching theme that has the desire to find a voice that can express a self-defined black woman's standpoint. I

make the argument that Black women's narratives offer a unique insight into interlocking patterns of oppression that contribute to their incarceration. This thesis analyzes these varying themes and how the intersection of social and structural factors told through their very own stories influences their criminal decision-making. Using a Black Feminist Thought framework is essential to capture black women's experiences as both offenders and women who live through the collateral consequences of mass incarceration.

## **1.2 Expected Results**

Black women, their involvement in criminal activity, and the rise in their incarceration rates are growing areas to explore for researchers. There is research that examines what crimes in particular they are arrested for in comparison to their male counterparts as well as white women, but not so much why Black female offenders are committing various offenses and the impact of public policy on their sentencing and involvement as well. In the last twenty years, the increasing presence of women in correctional systems has sparked an interest in feminist research grounded in the area of women's pathways to incarceration (DeHart, 2008, p. 2). The impact of various relationships within women's lives and economic circumstances both have been attributed to women's pathways into criminality and incarceration. While those impacts are important to discuss, according to Johnson (1996), such discussions of black female criminality are often based on one key assumption by criminal justice scholars and never from responses of the women themselves. Not only are their voices not heard, Black women are perceived to be less criminal than the black male, but more criminal, especially more violently criminal, than the white female (Johnson 1996, 84). This misinterpretation effectively erases any discussion of the impact of race, class, gender, and sexuality on black women's criminality within the criminal justice discourse. Furthermore, it ceases to address the impact of unequally applied policies

while faulting black women for being black. This study attempts to fill this gap by using Black women's voices that will express a self-defined black woman's standpoint and bring understanding to the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality and public policy among incarcerated black women. The available literature offers three main arguments in understanding the rise in incarceration rates of African American women, and ways at understanding what are the responses to women as offenders: stigma, isolation, and marginalization imposed by social position, past victimization and sexual abuse which often leads women into a life of crime, and incarceration as a tool of repression and social control.

First, scholars argued that the crimes for which African American women are most often arrested and incarcerated are suggestive of their gendered and raced social position (Ferraro & Moe, 2003, p. 12). African American women have committed their crimes from gendered, race and classed positions that are politically, economically, and historically rooted. The stigma, isolation, and marginalization imposed by social position of many African American women is believed to lead to their participation in criminal activity (Richie, 1996, p. 2). Some criminologists suggest that patterns of crime among women represent extensions of their gender roles. Feminists, as do sociologists, recognize that individual women may commit crime or engage in deviant behavior, but they see these behaviors as related to the status of women in society—and more broadly, to how the social structure of gender is related to patterns of crime and deviance in society (Anderson, 2003). The earliest studies of women and crime reflect some of the highly sexist assumptions about women, and for a long time distorted what was known about women either as victims or perpetrators of crime. Author Beth Richie makes the argument that the choices that women have to make are harder and the consequences are more serious for women with low incomes, especially women of color whose lives are extremely stigmatized and

marginalized (Richie, 1996, p. 2). Such experiences of sexist assumptions, stigma, and marginalization may provoke a women to engage in criminal activity, and such activity may be the result of the social context in which they live. The social context of gender, race, and class relations shape both the causes and consequences of women's criminal behavior. Others may want to equate that although these women are being stigmatized and marginalized the escalating rates of violence against women, poverty, addiction, and women's participation in criminal activity is because of women's psychological, moral, or social inadequacies, and their problems in contemporary society are blamed on individual character flaws. However, it cannot continue to go unnoticed that the devastated and deteriorating position of some women in contemporary society is a socially constructed condition, and poor African American women in contemporary society are increasingly restricted by their racial/ethnic and class position, and constrained by the competing forces of tremendous unmet needs and very limited resources (Richie, 1996, p. 2).

Researchers conclude that women's involvement in criminal behavior changes when there are changes in their social roles (Anderson, 2003). By using life history methodology, the foundational body of research illustrates the complexity of Black women's lives in economically disenfranchised contexts. The women can speak towards their feelings about how societies have been organized in such a manner that they are almost destined to fail; they simply cannot succeed in the current social arrangements. For example, arrangements that can mean taking on the role as economic provider mostly for the family, therefore finding themselves as the sole provider for the family. Even with increased economic opportunity for women in the labor force, the vast majority of women remain in low-paid, low-status jobs (Anderson, 2003). Miller (1986) makes the compelling argument that the explanation for women's crime places the cause of women's crime in the context of their social class status, thereby supporting the long-standing association



sociologist have seen between poverty, unemployment, and crime. Such explanations just further support reasons of women's crime in the context of structural characteristics that involve race, class, and gender relations. Although the majority of the poor are certainly not criminals, poverty, and blocked opportunity, and the economic need they create, are major underlying causes of crime.

Secondly, researchers argued that a history of sexual abuse and past victimization amongst women often leads them onto the pathways to incarceration (Geiger, 2006, p. 2; DeHart, 2008, p. 1). Female offenders as opposed to being passive victims propelled into a life of crime are resisting against intolerable socioeconomic deprivation and extreme forms of abuse (Geiger, 2006, p. 2). Black women are tied to this powerlessness, a powerlessness that comes about from various abuse that happens within their lives. Referring to Gerda Lerner's definition of patriarchy "the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general" (Kurshan, 1997), it implies that men hold power, whether in institutions of society, over women, or over the family. Beth Richie (1996) who conducted a study of African American battered women in jail also revealed this pattern: 20 of the 26 battered women interviewed had been sexually abused in their intimate relationships as adults, whereas 12 had been sexually abuse as children. There is argument that that pathway from abusive and/or sexual victim to a convicted felon can follow multiple routes. One instance such as partner abuses can lead to homicide of the abuser or coercion into crimes by her partner (DeHart, 2008, p. 15). Two scholars argued that past victimization, particularly various sexual abuses, is the leading contributor to women's incarceration (Mc Daniels-Wilson & Belknap, 2008, p. 2). In a study of 391 women, seventy percent of the women reported one violation consistent with what qualifies as rape in most states

in the U.S. today. Half of the women reported child sexual abuse victimization (McDaniels-Wilson & Belknap, 2008, p. 2). Some scholars theorized that resistance against physical and sexual abuse rather than passivity is responsible for women's involvement in crime. Richie used a socio-psychological analytical model to highlight the ways in which what she coined as this type of "gender entrapment" impedes the lives of these women.

A final theme in the literature is the penal system usage as a mechanism to repress and control certain populations. Several peculiar institutions have been in place to define, confine, and control African Americans in the history of the United States. Other literature has pointed out the change in criminal justice policy is what has sparked such as increase over the last twenty years (Johnson, 2003, p. 39). With African Americans consisting of 48% of that population, there is this post 1980 acceleration that suggests the possibility that crime control and especially the drug war have had the effect of repressing dissent among the poor and making invisible disenfranchised populations (Oliver, 2008). Scholar David Merolla's argument suggested the state use of prisons as a form of social control represses black women the most. One aspect of the legislative war on drugs that is especially harmful to black women is conspiracy laws; often used to prosecute women who simply know or are romantically involved with a drug dealer (Merolla 2008, 261). Reynolds (2008) finds that "Essentially, neoliberal economic restructuring has created a surplus population of poor and unemployed citizens" (83) and the answer for dealing with these individuals is mass criminalization and incarceration.

The literature also revealed an introduction of new theories and sub-fields within disciplines that place Black Feminism at the center of analysis. While the history, patterns, and types of crime behind Black female incarceration can be mostly answered through the literature. However, what is less known is how the intersection of social and structural factors told through

their very own stories influences their criminal decision-making. The purpose of this study is to explore, through Black women's narratives, the intersection of Black womanhood, poverty, and incarceration using Black Feminist Thought. As well as explore that a sub-field of Criminology can describe the unique circumstances of imprisoned black women. Feminist Criminologist Hillary Potter introduces a Black Feminist Criminology theory that can advance future theorizing, research, and policy making regarding imprisoned battered black women (Potter, 2008). As a foundation for her research, Potter utilizes research from feminist criminology that argues the existence of a clear correlation and/or pathway between women's victimization and any consequent criminal behavior (Potter, 2008). Black Feminist Criminology expands on feminist criminology and is grounded firmly in Black feminist theory and critical race feminist theory. Black Feminist Criminology goes beyond just economics, race, and gender. It does more than just recognizes a significant connection between intimate partner abuse against women and crime, but also explore the impacts of structural, cultural, and familial influences on Black women's criminal behavior and pathways to crime. When considering the research question in addition to Black Feminist Thought, Black Feminist Criminology allows for an understanding and way to explore those interconnected situations through the women's life stories of their experiences. Upon exploring these interconnected situations, offered through Black Feminist Criminology, Black Feminist Thought I assumed it to provide a relevant context for understanding those interconnected situations and the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality in black women's pathways to crime and life experiences and the role these oppressions play in the incarceration of African American women. Using it as a framework allows for an overarching theme that has the desire to find a voice that can express a self-defined black woman's standpoint.

### **1.3 Problem Statement and Purpose**

While crime and imprisonment have been popular topics when it comes to the Black community few scholars center analysis on mass incarceration and black women. The research done on criminal activity has shown that there are gaps in the research when reporting on African American women criminal activity and incarceration rates. There has been this common perception that the criminal behavior of women and the delinquent behavior of girls are not serious problems, however, there has been this dramatic rise in the number of prison and jail inmates and the ranks of women inmates are increasing much faster than those of their male counterparts and the pace at which women are being convicted of various offenses is picking up faster than the pace at which men are convicted.

This gap in the research warrants further research on the increase of incarceration rates of the African American women based on race, social, and structural factors that lead to criminal activity and longer sentencing. The purpose of this study is to explore how race, gender, socioeconomic status, and public policy intervene at the intersection of criminality and victimization. By looking at structural factors and exploring other social factors (i.e. substance abuse, sexual abuse, fractured familial relations, and abusive intimate relationships) through the women's personal narratives shows how those factors contributes to knowing more than just what they went to prison for, but why there is this cycle—of victimization and criminality.

### **1.4 Significance and Nature of study**

This study applied Black feminist thought to understand some of the deeper socio-structural causes of the rapid increase in Black women's incarceration, and provides the relevant context for understanding the race, sexual, gender, and class oppressions that contribute to African American women's experiences with imprisonment. This study filled a gap in literature

by exploring the impact of neoliberal policies, in areas such as crime control and social factors that influence and impact criminal activity and sentencing for Black women. This study focused on describing the meaning of incarceration for African American women as depicted in the narratives of formally incarcerated Black women. This is also significant in its emphasis on mass incarceration in not only the state of Georgia, but specifically Atlanta, Georgia and its surrounding cities. This type of research is a rarity in its focus on Georgia and ways in looking at criminal involvement and criminal offenses committed by Black women. To attack questions like, what influences these African American women to engage in criminal activity? Or what is the cause of such rapid increase in their incarceration? Current and future scholars will benefit from a mixed methods approach to understanding what policies have led to the feminization of poverty, and increase in mass incarceration. As well as, raise key issues that go beyond an immediate concern with the institution of prison, but to go as far as interrogating notions of captivity, racism, classism, and oppression.

This study used a unique analysis combining theories from criminal justice and black studies. It provides an analysis to the literature on a historically ignored population. The activist community and those committed to reforming harmful policies in relation to Black women will have an understanding of those multiple factors, which can motivate them to push for re-forms. This study argues that part of the purpose of Black Studies is to produce scholar activists who are equipped with the knowledge to tackle the issues of the black community by studying and engaging issues within the community. By tackling these issues of our Black women with this study I hope to further expose the impaired economic living conditions of an already marginalized population of Black women and their families living in poverty. This allows for a call to action for changes in polices and an understanding of this women's life experiences and

how their stories provide a unique angle of vision on self, community and society, and that angle is situated in Black women's struggle against systems of oppression. The expectation for students of the discipline is to be knowledgeable of the present circumstances of people of African descent and theoretically address those issues while engaging the community to resolve those problems. This mixed methods non-experimental study attempts to explore a section of the population that receives little attention within the black community in order to address how race, gender, socioeconomic status, and public policy intervene at the intersection of criminality and victimization among black women.

#### **1.4.1 Considered and Rejected Methodologies and Designs**

Several qualitative methods were considered and rejected to see which would best fit the study. Ethnography is an approach that emphasizes the study of a phenomenon in the context of its culture. The most common ethnographic approach is field research in which the researcher goes in the field to observe the phenomenon in its natural state (Creswell, 2013). This approach was rejected for this study due to time and population restrictions. Phenomenology is a second qualitative method that focuses on people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). If the proposed research question was more focused on a group of black female ex-offenders that were arrested and imprisoned for only a specific crime, and they all had similar specific influences as to why they participated in the crime, or who all experience similar behavioral issues, and were impacted by all the same policies, a phenomenological approach would be best suited for this study. However, in this case a phenomenological approach would be inappropriate because this all relevant influencing factors will likely vary from person to person. A third approach that was considered was grounded theory. The purpose of grounded theory is to develop a theory about a phenomenon of interest that is rooted in observations

(Creswell, 2013, p. 83). This approach was also rejected as well due to population restrictions, and the notion that the actions, interactions and social processes of the ex-offenders will vary and the interrelating categories for the group of women may not create such a clear movement or process in the influence to commit crime, and this can be viewed as a weakness when attempting this approach. Therefore, in order to assess this cycle of victimization and criminality, a life-history methodology mixed methods approach to develop a model of explaining women's illegal activities by way of race, class, gender, and public policy is used in this study.

#### **1.4.2 Selected Design Appropriateness**

The design of this study relies on descriptive analysis and pattern coding to understand the complex interactions of events and the ongoing social processes that are associated with African American women's circumstances that lead to arrest, incarceration and longer sentencing. Descriptive analysis determines the influence of variables on a dependent variable which in this study are the influence to engage in criminal activity and length of sentence. Pattern coding will allow for reoccurring themes in the data. "Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation" (Saldaña, 2013, p.210). The analysis and coding addresses the research questions: Using Black feminist thought as the theoretical approach, can exploring life experiences and personal narratives of incarcerated African American women show how race, class, gender, and sexuality intersect to influence African American female pathways into crime?

#### **1.5 Research Question**

To explore how race and socioeconomic status, and public policy intervene at the intersection of criminality and victimization in Black women's lives one question was asked:

Can exploring life experiences and personal narratives of previously incarcerated African American women show how race, class, gender, and sexuality intersect to influence African American female pathways into crime?

This question was chosen to see whether or not the structural factors and other social factors through the women's personal narratives contributes to knowing more than just what they went to prison for, but why there is this cycle—of victimization and criminality

## **1.6 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study combines Black Feminism and Criminology. Black Feminist criminology expands on feminist criminology and is grounded firmly in Black feminist theory and critical race feminist theory. Having a theoretical understanding of the relationship between black women and state criminal legislation can begin with a discussion of Feminist Criminology, and Black Feminist Criminology. Black Feminist Criminology goes beyond just economics, race, and gender. It recognizes a significant connection between intimate partner abuse against women and structural, cultural, and familial influences. In addition to recognizing the significance of social factors like abuse, cultural and familial influences the theory incorporates the tenets of interconnected identities, interconnected social forces, and distinct circumstances to better theorize, conduct research, and inform policy regarding criminal behavior and victimization among African American women. Black Feminism posits an intersectionality of oppression faced by women of color: racism, sexism, and classism.

Positing that studies focusing on this tripartite of race, class and gender will uncover, redefine, contextualize, and validate the experiences of black women and in this instance, the experiences of incarcerated black women. The oppression and victimization of black women occurs on multiple interlocking levels of race, class and gender, and is relevant to the growing



body of research about mass incarceration because relations with prison, either as an inmate or through connections to incarcerated individuals, creates another disadvantaged status that interacts with the other subordinated statuses black women face (Christian & Thomas, 2009, p. 70).

### **1.7 Definition**

Some of the main terms that are frequently used in this study are mass incarceration, deviance, and crime. Mass incarceration as developed by David Garland defines mass incarceration as referring to the penal system over the past two decades and the systematic incarceration of whole groups of the population. It emerged as the over determined outcome of a converging series of policies and decisions (Garland, 2001, p. 6). Therefore, mass incarceration is the culmination of laws and policies as opposed to a conspiracy contrived by a group of policy makers. Deviance is defined by sociologist as a behavior that departs from conventional norms, noting that norms vary from one situation to another; consequently, sociologists see deviance as located in a social context (Anderson, 2003, p. 263). Knowing understanding this context is essential to understanding deviant behavior. Feminist perspectives on crime define crime and the criminal justice system as systems of social control. What is considered crime is established by powerful persons in the society, who define some acts as criminal in order to protect their own interests (Anderson, 2003). Feminist perspectives on crime and gender take a broadly based view of criminal behavior. Much criminological research generally asks who committed the crime and why; feminist see crime within a holistic context of social power, gender relations, and economic stratification (Anderson, 2003).

## **1.8 Scopes, Limitation, and Delimitations**

The subjects of this study are formally incarcerated black women of Georgia who have served time in jail, a state/federal prison, or both who have come through the Non-Profit organization Forever Family, Inc. This allows the study to be manageable. The particular limitations of the life-history methodology used in this study falls into three categories: 1) ethical and logistical dilemmas; 2) the validity of the information presented; and 3) the generalizability of the research findings. This study includes personal interviews and is not limited to public information of the formally incarcerated women such as year of birth, race, gender, current and past conviction, county of conviction, sentencing, and place of judicial supervision.

## **1.9 Chapter Conclusion**

Black women account for thirteen percent of the U.S. population, but are fifty percent of the female prison population (Sokoloff, 2005, p 129). This study argues that understanding the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality in African American women's lives and the way public policy intervenes in their pathways to crime and incarceration, by way of personal life histories, allows for an overarching theme that has the desire to find a voice that can express a self-defined black woman's standpoint. Stigmatization and marginalization, past victimization and sexual abuse which often leads women into a life of crime, and incarceration as a tool of repression and social control are the main themes explaining racial and gender incarceration inequalities found in the literature. This study fills a gap by combining theories from Black Feminism and Criminology. The study provides descriptive data and pattern coding on the scope of the women's criminal history, while exploring how the interlocking oppressions of race, class and gender affected their trajectories. This study accomplishes this by using descriptive analysis and pattern coding to highlight patterns and differences that may emerge from the women's life-

histories. When using quantitative data such as the women's demographic background, education level, socioeconomic status, types of crimes, and length of sentencing, it allows for an analysis of inferential statistics.

### **1.10 Chapter Summary**

Chapter 1 presented the purpose of the study. It included an introduction of the conceptual framework for the study and chosen research design. This chapter introduces how this thesis analyzes these varying themes and how the intersection of social and structural factors told through their very own stories influences their criminal decision-making. Using a Black Feminist Thought framework is essential to capture black women's experiences as both offenders and women who live through the collateral consequences of mass incarceration. Black feminist thought, as a theoretical stand-point, stresses the importance of the black women's experience in relation to the tripartite of race, class and gender (Willingham, 2001). This study argues that research on mass incarceration of black women necessitates a conceptual framework of Black Feminism theory and Criminology. Chapter 2 reviews the available literature on mass incarceration with three major themes and minor themes.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter reviews the current literature on the rise in mass incarceration of African American women. This is done through the exploration of narratives to show how the participants related personal histories characterized by poverty, victimization, chronic substance addiction, and repeated failed attempts at sobriety to pathways of criminality. The literature provides an overview of the major themes and several minor themes that contribute to the body of knowledge on the rise in incarceration rates of African American women, and ways at understanding what are the responses to women as offenders. The literature review first

examines the history on the incarceration of African American women in North America from slavery until now. The review includes the major social and structural factors influencing Black female incarceration. The current literature allows for the exploration of how race and socioeconomic status, and public policy intervene at the intersection of criminality and victimization. Also, by looking at structural factors and exploring other social factors (i.e. substance abuse, sexual abuse, fractured familial relations, and abusive intimate relationships) through the women's personal narratives contributes to knowing more than just what they went to prison for, but why there is this cycle—of victimization and criminality. The literature review also discusses Black Feminist Thought, types of crime, Feminist Criminology, and Black Feminist Criminology.

The body of literature on mass incarceration presents three (3) major themes to explain why African American women are offending and being incarcerated in higher numbers: (1) impacts based on social positions, (2) repression and social control, and (3) past victimization and sexual abuse. Minor themes were also found in the literature that contributed to the rise in incarceration of African American women, such as family responsibilities, societal problems, public opinion, confined by social conditions, and the rise of non-violent criminal convictions among women of color.

## **2.1 History of Black Female Incarceration in the United States**

### **2.1.1 Historical Relationship of Black Women and the Criminal Justice System**

It began with chattel slavery from the antebellum era to the Civil War, the Jim Crow system in the agrarian South from Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Revolution, and then the ghetto in the northern industrial metropolis. With the system of chattel slavery came new dimensions of race-based differential criminality and punishment. Then in the wake of

Reconstruction era failures and Jim Crow schemes emerged a new era of racially biased criminal laws and other regulations restricting Black life. To be a black woman in the nineteenth-century America was to live in the double jeopardy of belonging to the “inferior” sex of an “inferior” race (Johnson, 1995-96, p. 14). By the mid-nineteenth century the female prisoner population had increased in several states such that women required accommodations of their own. Race and class were starkly implicated in the development of women’s penal institutions. There were two bifurcated prison systems, where one system was divided along gender lines, creating institutions for men and women; the other was subdivided along racial lines, such that men and women’s institutions were populated predominantly by African American men and women (Johnson, 2003, p. 32). During the Civil War and post-Civil War, in Maryland black women outnumbered white women incarcerated in state prison. The Maryland legislature introduced a number of provisions to control the Black population, and the black women inmates often received longer sentences and served more time than their white counterparts (Young, 2001, p. 116-117). This rise of black women incarceration was not limited to southern states below the Mason Dixon line. Criminal conviction and imprisonment of women soared during and after the Civil War in the North. This was commonly attributed to a multitude of factors, including men’s absence during wartime, the rise of industrialization, as well as the impact of the dominant sexual ideology of the nineteenth century Victorianism (Kurshan, 1997). The double standard of Victorian morality supported the criminalization of certain behaviors for women, but not for men. In New York in the 1850s and 1860s, female “crime against persons” tripled while “crimes against property” rose ten times faster than the male rate (Kurshan, 1997). There has always been this disproportionate incarceration of Black people, both men and women, at all times in all places. It seems fair to say that many blacks stepped from slavery into imprisonment. The

spiraling rates of black imprisonment in both the North and South meant that by mid-century there were enough women prisoners, both in the North and South, to necessitate the emergence of separate women's quarters.

As a part of the re-entrenchment of Euro American control and the continuing subjugation of black people, the post-civil war southern states passed infamous Jim Crow laws which made newly freed blacks vulnerable to incarceration for the most minor crimes (Kurshan, 1997). African American women filled prisons at numbers far exceeding their representation in the general population in all geographical regions (Johnson, 2003, p. 32). African American women were systematically channeled into prisons, while white women were channeled out. Underlying the differential treatment of women on the basis of race creates this fundamental belief that some members of the U.S. society are more deserving of criminal labels and harsher punishment under criminal laws. Such disparities in women's incarceration rates and treatment have grown rather than diminished in modern times.

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century reformatories for women were developed alongside custodial prisons. Women in custodial prisons were frequently convicted of felony charges; most commonly for "crimes" against property. Most of these women were Black. Contrast to custodial prisons, reformatories, as the name implies, were intended to be benevolent institutions that "uplifted" or "improved" the character of the women held there, and they were prominent in the Northeast and Midwest, and those that existed in the South were exclusively white. Mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> Century a time of Jim Crow and Civil Rights movement custodial prisons for women and the reformatories had basically merged. In the 1930s, the U.S. experienced the repression of radicalism, the decline of the progressive and feminist movements, and the Great Depression. Even though the demise of reformatories came along with these changes, the prison reform had achieved its goal of

separate prisons for women. With this goal of separate prisons increasingly white women convicted of misdemeanors were given probation, paroled, or sent to local jails, whereas Black women were now moved into the old reformatories and in larger numbers.

Beginning in the 1970s, the prison system was employed to help contain a population viewed as deviant and dangerous (Wacquant, 2000, p. 377). The penal system being used as a mechanism to repress and control certain populations is an ever growing factor in today's society. Several peculiar institutions have been in place to define, confine, and control African Americans in the history of the United States. Even though these prisons serve as instruments of social control for both men and women, women have traditionally entered the criminal justice system for different reasons than men (Henriques & Manatu-Rupert, 2001). Despite committing different crimes or being arrested for different offenses than their male counterparts the legal system mirrors and upholds the sexist ideology that legitimates women's position. The techniques of legal control over women take on broader significance when examining the class character of the law, as it becomes apparent that protection of women's rights is not a priority (Klein & Kress, 2014).

### **2.1.2 Types of Crime**

According to Sudbury (2012), women continue to be incarcerated for “nonviolent survival crimes,” which include sex work, drug couriership, fraud, and embezzlement. Women's crimes typically fall into two categories namely, drug and property offenses. Their property offenses are often economically driven, motivated by poverty and the abuse of alcohol and drugs. They view their participation in illegal activity as a form of work needed to support an addiction, family, intimate partner, or all of the above. In fact, it has been argued that women are immersed into crime, “a concept which takes into account the slide into criminality by way of survival

strategies and which reflects the difficulty women have in extricating themselves from the relationships, addictions, and economic necessities which arise once they are immersed in ‘street work’” (Cox, 2012).

According to Alfred and Chlup (2009) in today’s society, the rise in poverty in the U.S. and around the globe is closely tied to neoliberal policies that developed from the ideology that the “market” should drive all social, political, and economic decisions of a nation, and as a result, goods and services that were once set aside to provide a safety net that would allow for justice, equity, and democratic participation of all citizens have come under attack by neoliberal capitalism. This attack has brought on policies and reform and crime control laws that are evident and suggests that these sets of legislation have contributed to Black women’s incarceration.

## **2.2 Social and Structural Factors Affecting Black Female Incarceration**

Several themes emerged in the literature on Black female incarceration in the United States: stigma, isolation, and marginalization imposed by social position, repression and social control, and past victimization and sexual abuse. The following section outlines the major themes and minor themes within the literature and their relationship to each other and the context in which they contribute to the body of knowledge on the rise in incarceration rates of African American women, and ways at understanding what are the responses to women as offenders.

### ***2.2.1 Major Themes***

#### *Major theme 1: The stigma, isolation, and marginalization imposed by social position*

The crimes for which African American women are most often arrested and incarcerated are suggestive of their gendered and raced social position (Ferraro & Moe, 2003, p. 12). African American women have committed their crimes from gendered, race and classed positions that are politically, economically, and historically rooted (Ferraro & Moe, 2003, p. 12). The stigma,



isolation, and marginalization imposed by social position of many African American women is believed to lead to their participation in criminal activity (Richie, 1996, p. 2). In contrast to White women, for many African American women their everyday existence has been shaped by very threatening circumstances, many deferred dreams, tremendous unmet needs, and exceptionally hard choices. When looking at women's imprisonment, specifically women of color, salient factors such as discrimination, race, poverty, education level, and other social deprivations cannot be ignored. There is this notion that social position of African American women allows for this continued willingness to equate African American women with criminality which then in turn justifies disproportionately harsh treatment of them in the criminal justice system and throughout American society (Johnson, 2003, p. 40). This harsh treatment happens because given their history of social exclusion, it seems almost certain that the social condition African American women face prior to their incarceration is marked by extreme powerlessness.

One cannot understand the disparity in African American women's representation in the U.S. criminal justice system without examining the historical precedent. To speak briefly, in colonial America, a time of European settlement, the criminal laws were especially harsh toward enslaved persons, servants, and women, and race gradually signified criminality among groups that previously had been considered relatively par (Johnson, 2003, p. 19). This only grew worse for those of African descent in that as Africans they were deemed unfit to join the community of "civilized, Christian Europeans" because of their race (Johnson, 2003, p. 20). Presently in this country some women are coerced or forced by circumstances into doing things they do not want to do. This condition of being coerced is very prominent in their ever changing lives. They regularly feel required to make hard choices among, at times, very poor options. Author Beth

Richie makes the argument that the choices that women have to make are harder and the consequences are more serious for women with low incomes, especially women of color whose lives are extremely stigmatized and marginalized (Richie, 1996, p. 2). To place in context Richie's argument, while these women are being stigmatized and marginalized the conclusion can be drawn that the escalating rates of violence against women, poverty, addiction, and women's participation in criminal activity is because of women's psychological, moral, or social inadequacies, and their problems in contemporary society are blamed on individual character flaws. Contrary to this conclusion Richie, through African American women's personal narratives, show the contradiction to what is popularly expressed, and shows how the devastated and deteriorating position of some women in contemporary society is a socially constructed condition. Poor African American women in contemporary society are increasingly restricted by their racial/ethnic and class position, and constrained by the competing forces of tremendous unmet needs and very limited resources (Richie, 1996, p. 2).

Intersectional analyses that focus on incarcerated and formerly incarcerated Black women's lives have challenged mainstream notions of crime and defied simplistic notions about individuals who "choose" to participate in crime and subsequently become incarcerated. By using life history methodology, the foundational body of research illustrates the complexity of Black women's lives in economically disenfranchised contexts. Author Paula Johnson (2003), speaks to how the gross demographic disparity throughout the criminal justice system may reflect racial prejudice on the part of the police, the prosecutors, the judges, and the juries, so that, crime for crime, Black and Hispanic, offenders are more likely to be arrested by the police and are more likely to be dealt with severely by the courts (p. 40). This gross demographic disparity that Johnson speaks of is argued to be set up by these women's very own societies.

Societies that have been organized in such a manner that some women are almost destined to fail; they simply cannot succeed in the current social arrangements. For example, arrangements that can mean taking on the role as economic provider mostly for the family, therefore finding themselves as the sole provider for the family. As the research presents, one consequence is that many of these women engage in behaviors they hope will offset their severe economic lack—drug-related activity, theft, prostitution, and so on, and these behaviors, inevitably, lead to arrest and imprisonment (Henriques & Manatu-Rupert, 2001).

While there is the argument that indeed it is the social arrangements that need to change, Richie points out that for most feminist scholarship there is this unilateral abolition of gender roles as an organizing construct, but it must be understood that despite the advantages of alternative identities and lifestyles for some women, for most low-income women of color, existing outside of the dominant society and non-conformity with the mainstream is not a privileged position or a viable option (3). African American women's lives are often impacted by systemic racial violence, experiences with male physical and sexual abuse, and participation in illegal markets to survive (Richie, 1996, 2012). There has to be an understanding of the relationship between women and criminal behavior, and that this understanding requires examination of women's unique economic and social position in modern capitalist society, which is rooted in the sexual and maternal aspect of female life.

### *Major theme 2: Repression and Social Control*

While there has been research that focuses on salient factors such as discrimination and poverty and attributes the sharp increase in women's imprisonment to changing social mores regarding American women's roles, other literature has pointed out the change in criminal justice policy is what has sparked such an increase over the last twenty years (Johnson, 2003, p. 39).

This change in criminal justice policy stems from what Freda Adler posits as a 'dramatic' upsurge in women's criminal activity. She claimed while women have demanded equal opportunity in the fields of legitimate endeavors, a similar number of determined women have forced their way into the world of major crime (Adler, 1975, p. 3). This change in nature of female involvement in a wide variety of crime has sparked the emergence of this 'new female criminal' who is engaged in predatory crimes of violence and corporate fraud and has now broken into a man's world. Alder posits that according to the women's liberation movement theory the feministic social movement had increased women's opportunities, and thirst, for crime (Looper, 2004). The "women liberation theory" of women's imprisonment ignores salient factors such as discrimination, race, poverty, and other social accounts for African American women's incarceration. Women's liberation thesis is a theory that women's involvement in crime will come to more closely resemble men's as gender inequality between women and men are diminished by women's greater social participation and equality (Looper, 2004). While there is some evidence that crimes committed by equally placed women are beginning to resemble men's, there is not much empirical evidence to support this perspective of women's liberation theory. One policy change was the legal response to drug-related offenses. Although the argument here is that the rise is solely because of changings in the laws and not on salient factors, this policy change provides the most glaring example of racial-gender-class bias within the criminal justice system. These issues must be examined with much regard to their particular impact on African American women's lives. While women still seem to comprise a small portion of the total U.S. prison population, they have been the fastest-growing segment of the prison population in contemporary times. African American women are the largest percentage of incarcerated women (Johnson, 2003, p. 34). Theories pertaining to women's liberation now seemingly appear to be discredited.

As experts acknowledge that while the rise in women's incarceration is due to the result of changes in the criminal laws and sentencing practices, race, discrimination, and gender are still very prominent.

One of the most profound neoliberal attacks came with the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 which changed the culture of welfare from a system of governmental support to one of personal responsibility and self-sufficiency. Since most women of color are said to be young single mothers who are likely to be on welfare (Henriques & Manatu-Rupert, 2001), this was a direct attack on women of color. These policies were committed to undoing many of the social arrangements of a welfare state. As a result, these policies have created huge deficits, high unemployment rate, and job layoffs (Giroux, 2005), thus exacerbating the economic living conditions of an already marginalized population of women and children living in poverty. As Giroux (2005) explains, neoliberal policies and practices have made political and economic power available to a select few, have elevated market needs above social needs, have promoted social needs as unnecessary and wasteful, have diverted public funds away from the ones most in need, and have brought public welfare services under attack. Furthermore, part of the destruction resulting from welfare reform is the increased crime rate among women in poverty. Without the governmental safety net and confronted with low literacy, unemployment, mental health illness, drug addiction, racism, and as the single head of household, many women turn to economic crimes for financial support, thus accounting for the rise in incarceration among African American women.

"Tough on crime" policies have also contributed to incarceration rates. In 1973, New York State's "Rockefeller Drug Laws," called for a mandatory minimum of 15 years to life term for anyone convicted of selling two ounces or possessing four ounces of heroin or cocaine,

regardless of the offender's criminal history (Alfred and Chlup, 2009). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, several states adopted similar mandatory minimum laws. "Three strikes" laws that mandate long sentences for a third offense and "truth in sentencing" laws that reduce parole possibility have all eroded indeterminate sentencing and judicial discretion resulting in longer average sentences across all categories of crimes (Alfred and Chlup, 2009). One cannot ignore the role that race and racism play in the prison boom. Currently, two-thirds of prisoners are Black or Latino; in the 1970s, only one-third of inmates were people of color. Low-income, low-literate women, said to be women of color, on welfare are routinely pushed into dead-end jobs through welfare-to-work programs that de-emphasize education in favor of service work that does not pay a living wage. Reynolds (2008) finds that "Essentially, neoliberal economic restructuring has created a surplus population of poor and unemployed citizens" (83) and the answer for dealing with these individuals is mass criminalization and incarceration.

*Major theme 3: Past victimization and sexual abuse*

As stated before the social conditions that African American women face before entering incarceration can be masked by this extreme powerlessness. Black women are tied to this powerlessness, a powerlessness that comes about from various aspects of their lives. These various aspects take place against a backdrop of patriarchal relationships. Referring to Gerda Lerner's definition of patriarchy "the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general" (Kurshan, 1997), it implies that men hold power, whether in institutions of society, over women, or over the family. With the current understanding of sexual assault as an act of violence, theorists also came to understand sexual assault as a manifestation of and means for ensuring female subordination. Sexual assault must also be understood historically, in the

context of legal and social frameworks within which women were considered the property of men. Being considered property of men allows this powerlessness to be constant through experiences such as sexual abuse. Women may face such assault during their childhood years and as adults. Incarcerated African American women represent disproportionately higher rates of sexual abuse cases compared with women who have not been incarcerated (Henriques and Manatu-Rupert, 2001). Geiger (2006) argues that female offenders, as opposed to being passive victims propelled into a life of crime, are resisting against intolerable socioeconomic deprivation and extreme forms of abuse (2). Beth Richie (1996) who conducted a study of African American battered women in jail also revealed this pattern: 20 of the 26 battered women interviewed had been sexually abused in their intimate relationships as adults, whereas 12 had been sexually abused as children. Richie's study illustrates the ways in which women from low-income communities that are physically battered, sexually assaulted, emotionally abused, can be involved in illegal activity. The clear argument can be made that for some the rise of incarceration among women stems from a history of victimization and sexual abuse that the women may experience.

Some scholars theorize that resistance against physical and sexual abuse rather than passivity is responsible for women's involvement in crime. Richie used a socio-psychological analytical model to highlight the ways in which "gender entrapment" impedes the lives of these women. This gender entrapment can be viewed as the intersection of gender, race/ethnicity, and violence that then creates an "effective system of organizing African-American battered women's behavior into patterns that leave them vulnerable to private and public subordination, to violence in their intimate relationships and, in turn, to participation in illegal activities" (Henriques & Manatu-Rupert, 2001). To further support the conclusion this such gender

entrapment and having a past traumatic history, Joanne Belknao argues that women's pathways to criminal activity holds that traumas and victimizations are risk factors for offending, and in fact a great deal of research has documented the extensive trauma and abuse histories of female offenders (2010). Little has been done to account for Black women's pasts, and sometimes when this is done, the women are blamed for the deplorable conditions of childhood or adulthood. When looking at the interface between violence against women, law enforcement intervention, the use of technology, the boundaries between citizen rights and institutional policies, and the creation of laws that regulate all of the above, one is able to see the ways in which the laws collide in different ways for different women.

### **2.2.2 Minor Themes**

The literature presents several minor themes that contribute to the incarceration of African American women and threaten to render these women recidivists. These issues include, but are not limited to substance abuse, sexual abuse, fractured familial relations, public opinion of Black women, and the rise of non-violent criminal convictions among women of color. There is this the atypical space of women and the burden of family responsibilities and lack of economic opportunities due to gender and racial oppression. The responsibilities of child care, combined with the burdens of economic marginality and domestic violence, lead some women to choose economic crimes or drug dealing as an alternative to hunger and homelessness (Ferraro and Moe 2003, 10). Persistent poverty and poor parenting create environments that may increase the likelihood of participation in crime. There are reports that high levels of economic inequity are related to high numbers of single-parent households among poor African Americans, which can result in poor parenting, which in turn can increase behavioral risks leading to arrests. These insights help shed light on the conditions that profoundly shape the social experiences of poor,



incarcerated African American women. Familial connections may become further fractured as a result of African American women's drug addictions. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that for poor, incarcerated African American women, the confluence of poverty, violence, race, gender, class, drug use and abuse, failed intimate relationships, and fractured familial ties will combine to undermine their individual efforts as they attempt to live successfully on the outside (Henriques and Manatu-Rupert, 2001).

Another explanation sometimes suggested for black women's crime rates is differential socialization and gender roles based on that of public opinion. Since Black women are assumed to be socialized to be more like men, they are also assumed to have a greater likelihood of engaging in crime. This socialization stems from gender roles which are socially constructed and not based on sex is learned behavior transmitted through socialization, and defined by culture. When looking at African American culture in this current European dominated society the literature examines the roles of African women and how they are not limited to domestic chores. Now expected to participate economically and socially in work and community affairs, Burgess (1994) points out that in today's modern society, the well-defined high expectations of a "woman's place" no longer exists; especially within the African-American community. The social and economic renditions which puts a strain on Black men unable to fulfill their fatherly role has broadened society's attitudes toward the multiple roles that Black women are faced with. A Black woman's place therefore is not only carried out in the home, but outdoors. This type of "masculinization hypothesis" can be traced to Lombroso, who observed over three-quarters of a century ago that women criminals have "a masculine aspect" (Lombroso and Ferrero 1958, 102). Whether or not black women are more masculine or less traditional than white women, the perception that they are less feminine and hence less deserving of the chivalry commonly

thought to be extended to women in the justice system may be an important factor in producing differences in arrests. Even though there is this notion that Black women are socialized to be like Black men and assumed to have a greater likelihood of engaging in crime, the great majority of women arrested are petty offenders. Women are apparently being arrested for proportionately fewer "violent" offenses than men (Klein and Kres, 2014). As violent crime convictions substantially drop, the incarceration of women skyrockets (Sokoloff 2005, 128). With the changes in the drug laws and the social construction of the drug user as a dangerous criminal, women are more vulnerable to arrest now than they were in the past (Sudbury 2002, 64).

A rise or decline in arrest rates does not necessarily indicate a rise or decline in real illegal activity. It may reflect the political situation in, or growth of, law enforcement circles, a different organization of the data, changes in arrest categories, or altered perceptions of women offenders by the police. Women's lack of participation in "big time" crime highlights the larger class structure of sexism that is reproduced in the illegal marketplace (Klein and Kres, 2014). In the current economic crisis, with the likelihood that women-along with other non-favored groups such as Third World people and the young will be the first fired, one may expect that women may begin to commit more "street offenses" as they are thrown out of work. The change in the family structures and functions, such as women increasingly heading households, may also affect future patterns of illicit activity. The literature also reveals a unique relationship between black women and the criminal justice system. The unequal punishment and attention by the criminal justice system to black women has roots beginning as early as the nineteenth-century up until now.

### **2.3 Impact of Incarcerated Black Women's Narratives**

The history, patterns, and types of crime behind Black female incarceration can be mostly answered through the literature. However, what is less known is how the intersection of social and structural factors told through their very own stories influences their criminal decision-making. The purpose of this study is to explore through Black women's narratives the intersection of Black womanhood, poverty, and incarceration using Black Feminist Theory. Exploring Black women's narratives in a Black feminist context, will offer a unique insight into these interlocking patterns of oppression. The oppressions that contribute to their stigmatization and marginalization because of certain social positions, which further contribute to their incarceration, and how discrimination based on race, gender, and sexuality extends to prison. The growth in the amount of Black women being incarcerated alone suggests a need for a closer study of intervention and policy changes in the criminal justice and corrections systems, but it becomes especially important to hear their stories to increase the understanding of their experience, because despite their sustained presence in prison, the voices of Black women are often excluded from discussion about the criminal justice system, corrections system, and their life experience with race, gender, and sexual oppressions. Author Breea Willingham, states that for Black women who were incarcerated unlike white women who are 'double marginal' being white and in prison, Black women suffer threefold—as a women, prisoner, and African American (2011). Their narratives offer a different perspective and approach to analyzing Black women's experience, and a unique form of activism and a continued struggle for freedom. The literature allows for the exploration into women's personal narratives and how this can explain how they are impacted by such social control and repression. It also gives a better understanding on how it affects each woman differently and not just having this collective notion that each

Black woman's experience is deviant, and while they may share similar challenges resulting from living in a society that historically and routinely derogates them, this does not mean that they all have had the same experiences. Willingham (2011) makes the argument that simply acknowledging that a legacy of struggle exists does not make the meaning of the struggle the same for all Black women. By exploring the ways repression and social control through different criminal policies has impacted these different women it authenticates such shared challenges and allows for a forum for Black women to relate their experiences to the world. Understanding the impact of sexual abuse and violence through the women's narratives allow for different emotional, cultural, and social factors specific and similar to some women. Exploring the variations in gender-identity development can lead to distinct types of vulnerability and abuse in the women's lives that, for some, compelled them to commit crime (Richie 2012).

#### **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

As an opening to understanding the relationship between black women, criminal activity, and state criminal legislation it can begin with a theoretical discussion of Feminist Criminology, and Black Feminist Criminology. This discussing the two theories allows for the recognition of issues of gender inequality from one theory and expansion beyond just economics, race, and gender into the recognition of a significant connection between complex condition and aiding in a more precise explanation of how Black women experience in the second theory. What brings it all into perspective is a theoretical understanding of Black Feminist thought which will allow for feminist analysis of Black women's narrative's that explores how the complex conditions of race, class, and gender meshes with contemporary globalized geo-political, economic, and social realities to influence African American female pathways into crime.

## 2.5 Feminist Criminology

Feminist criminology is an emerging theoretical field that evolved when various assumptions and stereotypes about women in criminal justice were being questioned. Such questions included women as professionals as well as women as offenders and victims. Contemporary feminist criminologists bear the responsibility of advancing an inclusive feminism, one that simultaneously attends to issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, nationality, religion, physical ability, and other locations of inequality as they relate to crime and deviance (Burgess-Proctor, 2014). Theoretically speaking, feminist criminology developed because (primarily liberal) feminist scholars objected to the exclusion of gender from criminological analyses, an omission that seemed particularly glaring given that gender is such a strong predictor of offending, arrest, and sentencing outcomes (Burgess-Proctor, 2014). Feminist scholars were dissatisfied with the failure of mainstream criminology to recognize issues of gender inequality at all, as well as with the failure of critical and radical criminology to consider the relationship between inequality and crime outside of the narrow context of economic disparities, under which were subsumed issues of race and gender. This type of equity theory negates the experiences of black women within the penal system but are the foundation for feminist criminology. To reconcile this, the field is moving into a more “nuanced” position that moves away from putting women into a dichotomy category as victims or criminals (Britton 2000, 72). Feminist criminology has aided in a notably improved understanding of gender variations in criminal activity and victimization and of the crime-processing system’s dealings with female and male victims and offenders. Black Feminist Criminology attempts to reconcile the gaps in Feminist Criminology.

## 2.6 Black Feminist Criminology

Black Feminist Criminology expands on feminist criminology and is grounded firmly in Black feminist theory and critical race feminist theory. Black Feminist Criminology goes beyond just economics, race, and gender. It recognizes a significant connection between intimate partner abuse against women and structural, cultural, and familial influences. It is argued that Black Feminist Criminology aids in a more precise explanation of how Black women experience and respond to intimate partner abuse and how the crime-processing system responds to battered Black women (Potter, 2006). The impetus for proposing a Black feminist criminology (BFC) is supported by Britton's (2000) argument that traditional feminist criminology still has much work to accomplish in theorizing from intersecting identities as opposed to placing emphasis on a solitary component—such as considering gender but not race—at the forefront of and central to an analysis (Potter, 2006). While Critical Race Feminist theory is a valuable approach for studies of crime and African American women because it provides a specific application for women of color involved in the crime-processing system as victims, offender, or both (Potter 2006, 112), Black Feminist Criminology extends beyond traditional, feminist criminology to view African American women and other women of color from their multiple positions in society (Potter 2006, 107). This view of African American women taken into context, Black Feminist Criminology incorporates the tenets of interconnected identities, interconnected social forces, and distinct circumstances to better theorize, conduct research, and inform policy regarding criminal behavior and victimization among African American women. When considering the research question Black Feminist Criminology allows a framework to explore those interconnected situations, and opens the doors to explore the interconnected identities through the women's life stories of their experiences using Black feminist thought.

## 2.7 Black Feminist Thought

The Black Feminist Movement grew out of, and in response to, the Black Liberation Movement and the Women's Movement. In an effort to meet the needs of black women who felt they were being racially oppressed in the Women's Movement and sexually oppressed in the Black Liberation Movement, the Black Feminist Movement was formed. All too often, "black" was equated with black men and "woman" was equated with white women. As a result, black women were an invisible group whose existence and needs were ignored. The purpose of the movement was to develop theory which could adequately address the way race, gender, and class were interconnected in their lives and to take action to stop racist, sexist, and classist discrimination (Collins, 2013). When considering Black Feminist Thought I assume it to provide a relevant context for understanding the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality in black women's pathways to crime and life experiences and the role these oppressions play in the incarceration of African American women. Using it as a framework allows for an overarching theme that has the desire to find a voice that can express a self-defined black woman's standpoint. This very standpoint is defined as specialized knowledge created by black women, which clarifies the 'experiences and ideas shared by black women and provides a unique angle of vision on self, community and society' and which is situated in these black women's struggle against systems of oppression. Black feminist thought will allow me to explore the levels that each woman experience the oppressions within their lives. People experience and resist oppression on three levels: the level of personal biography; the group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender; and the systemic level of social institutions. Black feminist thought emphasizes all three levels as sites of domination and as potential sites of resistance. Each individual women has a unique personal biography made up of concrete

experiences, values, motivations, and emotions. No two individuals occupy the same social space; thus no two biographies are identical. Black feminist thought as a framework is very prominent in answering the question can exploring life experiences and personal narratives of incarcerated African American women show how race, class, gender, and sexuality intersect to influence African American female pathways into crime.

## **2.8 Chapter Conclusion**

The overall literature provides multiple explanations for mass incarceration as well as various theories. The literature examines the gaps from the research and how pursuing such gaps will allow for an understanding and response to women as offenders and understanding their status as crime victims. Moreover, exploring how race and socioeconomic status, and public policy intervene at the intersection of criminality and victimization. The literature reviews reasoning as to why it is that African American women are engaging in pathways of criminal activity and what structural factors are causing this increase and impacting their sentencing. This review includes a historical analysis of the oppression of black women that has resulted in their overrepresentation in prisons, but at the same time speaks to how there is a rise in the incarceration of African American women and it cannot be ignored. The first major theme reflects on how women can be impacted due to their very own social position within society. African American women have committed their crimes from gendered, race and classed positions that are politically, economically, and historically rooted (Ferraro and Moe 2003, 12). The stigma, isolation, and marginalization imposed by social position of many African American women is what is said to lead to their participation in criminal activity (Richie 1996, 2). The next major theme was that of social repression and social control where Reynolds (2008) makes the argument that "Essentially, neoliberal economic restructuring has created a surplus population of



poor and unemployed citizens" (83) and the answer for dealing with these individuals is mass criminalization and incarceration. A final theme was that of sexual and violent abuse. Which gives insight as to how female offenders are propelled to a life of crime as a means of resistance and survival against intolerable socioeconomic deprivation and abuse (Geiger 2006, 6). Several minor themes also appear to explain this phenomenon. The literature speaks to several other minor themes as well, and how Black women were choosing crimes due to the responsibilities of childcare and the burden of economic marginality (Ferraro and Moe 2003, 10). Furthermore, the incarceration of women of color operates as an extension of their social exclusion within U.S. society (Henriques and Manatu-Rupert 2001).

## **2.9 Chapter Summary**

Chapter 2 gives a historical analysis of Black women, the criminal justice system, and the current mass incarceration trend for Black women. It explores main themes and various minor themes that are presented within the literature on African American women and why their incarceration rates are growing and what influences have lead them down particular criminal pathways. The literature speaks to Black female incarceration trends, discussed laws, codes, policies, and practices that have impacted and played a role into the increase of incarceration and longer sentencing for African American women. The literature makes claim of who are the type of women being imprisoned, bringing about a particular profile of Black female that have lived through certain experiences and this is profile of many of the Black women who are continuously filling up women's prisons. Following was a discussion of the ways in which personal narratives can be beneficial at addressing themes and finding out the women's reasons and influences to commit crime. As well as give the women a voice in telling their own stories and how living through various oppressions lead to different criminal decisions, and how they

understand living in a world where their race, gender, and class has impacted their lives. Lastly, it presents theories within the field of criminology and black feminism. A black feminist criminology perspective was introduced. Its potential to go beyond the gaps of Feminist Criminology was addressed in order to inform policy regarding criminal behavior and victimization among African American women, and how the tenets of interconnected identities, interconnected social forces, and distinct circumstances are needed to better theorize and conduct research on Black women, crime, and incarceration. Black Feminist Thought was introduced as a framework to go further than the changes needed on a structural level. It is a framework that provides a relevant context for understanding the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality. It also allows for the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking for such women. Using it as a framework allows for an overarching theme that has the desire to find a voice that can express a self-defined black woman's standpoint, and the synthesis of oppressions and how it creates the conditions of their lives.

### **3 RESEARCH METHODS**

The study was formulated to examine how personal experiences of violent victimization and incarceration intervene by way of race, gender, socioeconomics (class), and sexuality to influence paths of criminality and the impact of public policy on longer sentencing for previously incarcerated Black women. This study used an exploratory examination of women's life histories and analyzed the specific vantage points of the previously incarcerated women to understand their lives as Black women, mothers, and previously incarcerated Black women. The study examined structural determinants and personal narratives to shed light on how they influence incarceration rates of African American women. The study explored social factors specific to

each women's lives, and major themes within the narratives of the women. By examining the women's life histories the study will be able to offer an alternative view of the Black women's lives in order to hopefully shift the dominant social science paradigms and encourage a more respectful response and humane public policy response to the problems of crime, violence, poverty, racism, and gender discrimination for Black women....

### **3.1 Research Design**

This study utilized a mixed methods approach. Using a life-history methodology approach to develop a model of explaining women's illegal activities by way of race, class, gender, and public policy allowed for the measurement of the impact of race, class and gender on the participation in criminal activity. Next descriptive analysis was used to understand the complex interactions of events and the ongoing social processes that are associated with African American women's circumstances that lead to arrest, incarceration and longer sentencing. This was a non-experimental mixed methods study that sought to capture the women's own feelings, views, and meanings they give to the events in their lives. By showing the state racial, class, and gender composition on imprisonment, policy, and length of sentences allows for comparisons of the women in the sample based on the demographics of the sample.

### **3.2 Design Appropriateness**

The researcher chose not to do case studies, however has chosen to do a participatory observation of life-histories despite the given nature of the at-risk population. For this particular research, the narrative approach is best suited to capture the lived experiences of African American female ex-offenders and their accounts of criminal involvement. With this approach it allowed for different personal accounts of criminality to be told based on the lives of African American women in the context of the exact crime(s) that they committed. By obtaining their

stories first-hand on a personal basis and not through collection of empirical data allows for the capture of genuine authentic realities of different women. One of the strengths of life story interviews is the strong emphasis on holism. Lives are seen as whole, the public and private cannot be separated, and lives are contextual and should be studied and understood this way (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). Actively observing and interacting with this population over a substantial period of time is extremely difficult. However, it allowed for a more personal primary identification of the critical events within their lives, the women's emotional responses, factors that influenced their behaviors, the conditions of their household and communities through their eyes, and their personal response to structural factors that has impacted their arrest and sentencing. A qualitative method by way of a life-history approach was used to test and reveal the significance of race, class, gender, and public policy on criminality and length of sentence for previously incarcerated Black women. As well as the research questions can be best answered through this type of narrative qualitative analysis because it will allow for the focus on personal accounts of criminal involvement relevant to each individual females' lives. The life-history approach allowed the women to give context to their incarceration experiences by discussing the social and structural issues influencing their choices. With this type of personal account comes the reason as to why commit an offense, if it was more than once, how much time was spent in prison, were there several offense committed, whether they have changed their ways, or does their current lifestyles still permit for criminal activity to occur. The life-history interviews by way of open-ended questions were useful in gathering information about stigmatized, uncomfortable, and/or difficult circumstances in the participants' lives. The methodology is designed to elicit topical life-history narratives, in which such an approach has become a preferred means of data collection among those working with incarcerated and otherwise

marginalized populations whose experiences are not easily predetermined or quantifiable (DeHart, 2008).

### **3.3 Sampling and Population**

The sample included 2 African American women who are within the age group of 18-60 years old who have been previously incarcerated within the last 20 to 30 years of the study for either a drug related, violent, or non-violent crime from the Atlanta, Georgia and surrounding cities area. There were two participating women in the study. Women were recruited from women who have reached out for help from the non-profit organization Foreverfamily, Inc. The founder of the Organization Ms. Sandra Barnhill contacted the previously incarcerated women through email initially. They were separately emailed an announcement explaining what the actual study would entail. For those who were interested provided her with contact information and were then contacted by the researcher via the contact information they provided. Those that were recruited to participate in the study meet the requirements listed above. About the organization itself, Foreverfamily, Inc. is a non-profit organization that caters to the children of incarcerated and-or previously incarcerated family members, specifically mothers. The organization is located in the downtown metro area of Atlanta, Georgia. Since its inception in 1987, Foreverfamily (originally known as AIM) has helped more than 10,000 children, and focuses their efforts on children with an incarcerated parent. Not just stopping at helping the children, Foreverfamily offers education, training and support services to help parents from the time of their incarceration to their transition back to society. In helping parents understand how their role can transcend the bounds of prison Foreverfamily produces and supplies self-help manuals, facilitates quarterly workshops to help parents stay connected to their children, and holds parent-staff conferences— modeled after school-based parent-teacher conferences—to

provide updates on their children's progress. The organization also assist parents coming out of prison, our Foreverfamily program director, family advocate and volunteers provide support services, including assistance with finding appropriate clothing, understanding current social trends and coping with their readjustment to society. Since the organization has such strong ties, history, and continuing relationships with the families and the parent that is an excellent agent to obtain previously incarcerated African American women.

### **3.4 Measures**

The data was collected using the interview schedule created by the researcher, it guided the life-history interviews. The demographics of the women were gathered by way of questionnaires. The specific content of the interview included, but was not limited to measurements of family background, home environment, criminal history, nature, and extent of abuse both sexual and violent, involvement with illegal substances, involvement with the criminal justice system, influence in criminal participation based on others, own personal decisions, attitudes about the context of their criminal activity and encounter with the criminal justice system based on race, class, gender, and sexuality, and feelings about their sentencing.

### **3.5 Procedures**

Based on the life-history approach to the study, the researcher determined specific content of the interview needed to explore the women's past experiences with the criminal justice system, the community, and specific oppressions that influenced criminal activity. The researcher interviewed 2 Black women. Each female participant signed an informed consent form indicating that they willingly and knowingly agree to participant in the study, and were aware of risk relating to their participation according to the following five review criteria: 1) risk to subjects, 2) adequacy of protection against risks, 3) potential benefits to the subjects and

others, 4) importance of the knowledge to be gained, and 5) data and safety monitoring. Upon gathering the life-histories and demographic characteristics of the two women the researcher extracted several data points from each of the women's questionnaires and create a spreadsheet detailing, but was not limited to the crime(s) the women were convicted, length of sentence given, years of conviction, whether in a state or federal prison, race, age, number of children, and educational attainment. After compiling the data sheet with demographic data on the women the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with each participants that lasted between one to two hours. The interview consisted of open-ended questions to be able to examine the way in which these women's imprisonment reflects their social position in the culture. At a minimum the researcher explored the participant's family background and home background, the history, nature, and extent of violence or abuse (if any) in her life, substance abuse (if any) and, to a lesser extent, each woman's involvement in the criminal justice system. The semi-structured was recorded my audio tape only. On audio tap the women were not identified by name, so there will be no identifying names, phone numbers, or other personal information on the recording linking participants to their interview responses. If women would not like to be named within the study then the participants will have the options to have a pseudonym in place of their government name when discussing the results and findings.

### **3.6 Validity and Reliability**

Reliability is determined by the prospect of repeating a study and obtaining the same or similar outcome. Threats to the study reliability were minimized by coding the information for each measure and making sure to maintain efforts to ensure that the information being coded maintains at least 80% reliability throughout the coding process. The data collected from the questionnaires/surveys and the interviews were compared and contrasted for the purpose of

exploring the reliability of responses. Although the sample is not that large of a sample the researcher does believe that the expected sample amount for this study is a reliable amount. Mainly because the participants represent a reliable number of women from a target program for released ex-offenders, and speaks to reliability which tells us the degree to which we can reproduce our results in a repeat test. The more reliable a measure, the fewer subjects you need to see a small change in the measure. External validity is determined by the strength of the study's conclusion to be generalized to other similar conditions (Trochim and Donnelly 2008, 36). The study seems it may not address validity threats because there is no substantial sample size. However, the researcher used random samplings to choose form a group of women to achieve a smaller sample for testing. Lastly, there are just validity issues with qualitative studies within in research.

Construct validity is determined by the degree to which the method reflects the ideal, the relationship between the operationalization in the study to the theoretical construct on which the study is based (Trochim and Donnelly 2008, 58). Operationalization is the translation of the idea of what you want to measure into a real measure. The future attempts is to show that the increased incarceration of African American women is part of a cultural phenomenon that reflects their social exclusion and oppression within U.S. society. Assuming that members of marginalized groups can offer meaningful accounts of the ways in which the world is organized according to the oppressions they experience, the researcher feels it is appropriate to center the data collection and analysis on the direct accounts provided by the women about their life experiences.



### 3.7 Data Analysis

The purpose of using both qualitative and quantitative data is to provide descriptive data on the scope of the women's criminal history, while exploring how the interlocking oppressions of race, class and gender affected their trajectories. When using qualitative data from interviews of the women's life histories it allowed for an analysis of descriptive data. By focusing on areas such as the women's background (familial and community), exposure to criminal activity, facilitators and minimizing factors to criminal activity it allows for the analysis of data that helps describe, show or summarize their life histories in a meaningful way. Such that, for example, particular patterns might emerge from the data. Descriptive analysis was used to highlight patterns that may emerge from the women's life-histories. When using quantitative data such as the women's demographic background, education level, socioeconomic status, types of crimes, and length of sentencing, it allowed for an analysis of inferential statistics. It allowed the researcher to reach conclusions that extend beyond the immediate data alone. By using inferential statistic it created techniques that allowed the researcher to use these samples to make generalizations about the populations from which the samples were drawn. Generalizations as to what public policies affected the women based on the type of crime committed, their sentencing, the profiles of the women actually committing these crimes and being affected by the policies in place.

The controlled variables of this study are type of crimes committed. Independent variables include income, educational attainment, racial demographics, child/sexual abuse, drug use, and employment status of the sample. The dependent variable is the length of sentence, while gender is the constant.

### **3.8 Limitations**

The first limitation to the study is that due to the smaller sample size, results of the study may not be generalizable to the national population. Also, because the sample was obtained from a non-profit organization that caters to African American women who are the mothers, the sample only gave life-histories of those who have been previously incarcerated and are mothers. The study does not have accounts of those who are African American non-mothers and have been incarcerated for illegal activity. Other limitations include ethical and logistical dilemmas.

### **3.9 Chapter Summary/Conclusions**

Chapter 3 presents a mixed methods approach using both a qualitative and a quantitative approach. These two approaches are optimal choices to examine the life histories and public policy effects on each woman's lives. This type of descriptive study design allowed for an alternative model of explaining the women's illegal activity. As well as this type of analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data from this exploratory study allowed for an understanding through a Black feminist framework of how each women may simultaneously experiencing interlocking oppressions of race, class and gender affected their trajectories. The sample size and population began with a random sample size of women who were previously incarcerated African American women in the state of Georgia from the Atlanta and surrounding areas and were obtained through random sampling from the non-profit organization Foreverfamily, Inc. founded and ran by Ms. Sandra Barnhill. Several data points were extracted from each profile of the individual women and include the crime(s) the women were convicted, any prior convictions, length of sentence given, race, and year of birth and county of conviction. Taken the participants personal experiences done through interviewing allowed for an opportunity for linking the story

with the wider social, political and environmental context surrounding crime, the criminal justice system, and African American women.

The focus of chapter 4 will be the results and analysis of the both descriptive and inferential statistics. The chapter will also review the data collection and a descriptive analysis of the sample. The data analysis will include a discussion of the results with support from the literature.

## **4 RESULTS**

Chapter four presents the results and analysis of the data collected through the methodology described in chapter three and addresses the purpose of the study and answers the research question. The overriding research question and focus of the study was to qualitatively examine the incarceration experiences by discussing the social and structural issues influencing their choices among previously incarcerated Black women in the state of Georgia. As well as qualitatively and quantitatively examine and compare the demographic data and examine the impact of public policy on longer sentencing based on the women's lives.

### **4.1 Data Collection**

The Demographic information was obtained from the participants themselves. The researcher had the women fill out questionnaires that pulls out demographic information based on age, birth places, current residency, race, religion, children, education level, marital status, socioeconomic status, types of crimes, arrest, convictions and length of sentencing, locations of institutions, employment, welfare dependency, and abuse (sexual, physical, and mental). A descriptive analysis was performed on the sample size's demographic questionnaires and is illustrated in table 1, 2 and 3. Tables 1 and 2 break down the personal demographics and criminal

demographics of each participant. Table 3 illustrates what the women share and what their differences are based on there are personal and criminal demographics

*Table 1 Personal Demographics*

	Yolanda Diamond	Emfolla
Age	43	54
Birthplace	Cedartown, Ga	Quitman, Ga
Residence	Alto, Ga	Decatur, GA
Race/ Ethnicity	Black/African American	Black/African American
Marital Status	Single	Divorced
Religion	Christian/Baptist	Other: God/Hebrew
# of Children	2	2
Education Level	Some college-Certifications	Associates
Employment	Yes	Yes-runs an organization
Past Welfare Assistance	Couple of months-food stamps	Food Stamps
Abuse (physical, sexual, mental)	Yes	Yes
Childhood neighborhood	Middle class (Black and white)	Lower class (Hispanics, Caribbean, Cubans )
Current neighborhood	Upper class (mixed races i.e. White, Black, Asian)	Middle Class (elderly Blacks)

Table 2 Criminal Demographics

	Yolanda Diamond	Emfolla
# of Arrests	2	3
Arrest charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Shoplifting</li> <li>▪ Felony Murder, Vehicular Feticide, Reckless driving, DUI, Possession of a firearm, burglary (all on the same charge)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Altering a forged instrument</li> <li>▪ Drug conspiracy</li> <li>▪ Refusing to cooperate with US government in drug case (2x)</li> </ul>
# of Convictions	1	2
Time served	20 years and 6 months (1995-November 2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 7 years and 36 months (1999)</li> <li>▪ 36 months (2001)</li> </ul>
Location of institutions	Atlanta, GA Hawkinsville, GA Darisboro, GA	Marianna, FL Lexington, KY Bucks county, PA Alderson, WV
Illegal substance use	Yes	Yes
Type of time served	Federal	State and Federal

Based on the above information that researcher was able to pull out similarities and differences within the woman's demographic information.

Table 3 Demographics Similarities/Differences

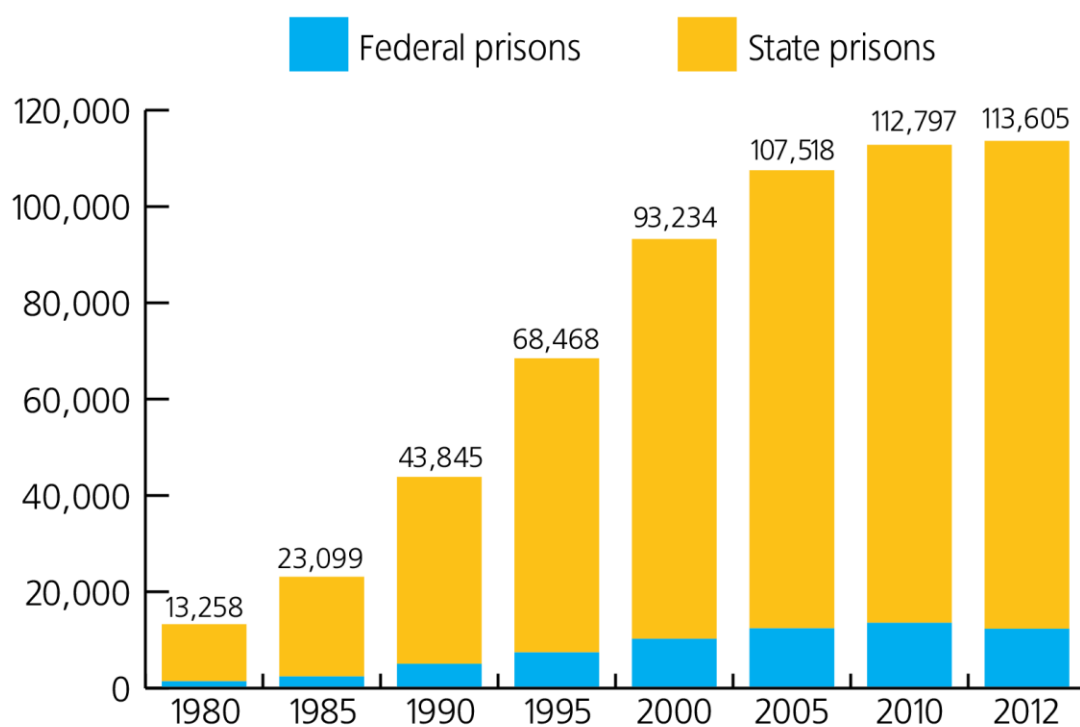
Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Religion</li> <li>▪ Children</li> <li>▪ Education level</li> <li>▪ Employed</li> <li>▪ Welfare assistance</li> <li>▪ Abuse</li> <li>▪ Illegal substance use</li> <li>▪ Type of time served</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Age</li> <li>▪ Marital status</li> <li>▪ Childhood neighborhood</li> <li>▪ Current neighborhood</li> <li>▪ Number of arrest</li> <li>▪ Type of crimes</li> <li>▪ Time served</li> <li>▪ Type of time served</li> </ul>

After laying out the Demographics and the differences and similarities between the two women next the researcher shows state data in Graph 1 the number of women in state and federal prison from the years 1980-2012 and table 4 shows the type of offenses that women were mostly arrested and convicted for. Comparing the women's demographic data to the state data of women

in the justice system the researcher is able to show how they were indeed a part of the large number of women who were incarcerated and how the types of crimes in which they were imprisoned for falls into the category of offenses related to women offenders.

*Figure.1 Number of Women in State and Federal Prison, 1980-2012*

## Number of Women in State and Federal Prisons, 1980-2012



Source: Carson, E.A., Golinelli, D. (2013). *Prisoners in 2012*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics

Table 4 Categories of Offenses

Code	Categories
1	Drug-Related: ( i.e. manufacturing, conspiracy, possession with intent to distribute, selling and distributing, and trafficking)
2	Violent Crimes: (i.e. aggravated and misc. assault and battery, criminal damage, murder, and manslaughter )
3	Property Crimes: ( i.e. burglary, theft, and robbery)
4	Crimes w/ Children & Elderly: (i.e. aggravated child molestation, cruelty to children and elderly, kidnapping, incest, rape and sex offender fail to register)
5	Miscellaneous: (i.e. criminal interference, racketeering, false statement, forgery, credit card fraud, possession of firearm as a convict)

Table 5 Criminal Coding

	Code
Yolanda Diamond	2, 3
Emfolla	1, 5

What the demographics shows is that regardless of these differences each participant had experiences and certain decisions made in life that led to a path of criminality. Looking that the women's similarities and differences (table 3) and the women's criminal coding (table 5) each women served state time and committed different offences, further showing that each women although grouped together as statistics of women who served time in prison went for different offenses and different sentencing, and had different experiences that led them there. While different in age, different marital status, and different neighborhood characteristics after comparing the demographic information and audio recordings of the interview and the transcripts of each participant the researcher then identified similar themes and patterns as well as differentiating factors amongst the women that led to this very similar outcome that they share overall, being incarcerated, Black women and victims of the criminal justice system. Their stories are written in the context of the (1) first encounter with the criminal justice system, (2) a walkthrough of their experiences with criminal activity, (3) childhood exposure to crime, (4)

what was expected from engaging in criminal activity, what were the (personal) reasons for engaging in various activity with descriptions and why were those the reasons, (5) drug use influences, (6) how their race, class, and gender played into their choices and sentencing, (7) other choices made and influences from those around them, what was beyond their control (8) influenced by others around you, friends and/or family to commit criminal acts, being a black woman growing up in the way you did influenced your criminal involvement (9) there education levels and its impact on their choices and experiences, (10) what helped them get through incarceration, and (11) what they would do differently. After reviewing my interview responses, the researcher applied Black Feminist Thought by analyzing the ways in which each participant's life experiences specific to their life experience has influenced different or similar paths of criminality. This data in tables 6 and 7 give the questions posed to each participant and their responses. The data in table 8 and 9 is descriptive analysis of the life experiences of each participant as well as the coded responses for the context in which their stories were told.



Table 6 Yolanda's Life Story

Questions/ Discussion	Participant Response
(1)	Shop lifting with a group of friends around the age of 19/20. Had them boosting for her. No time served.
(2)	Started with the fact that she use to sell dope, one of her client/friends sold her to a guy that held her captive. In the 2-3 day period he held her captive he assaulted her, drugged her up. Her captive committed a burglary and in the midst of the crime they were chased by law enforcement. He forced her to run She was driving and she ended up getting in a car accident and the other persons in the car were killed. She was charged with her convictions along with the act of burglary and a fire arm which were her captives charges ad she was just charged with them also
(3)	In the context of her selling drugs it was a direct link to her latter experiences which caused her to go to prison, she would say yes, because being in the type of environment in which she was, it began to fascinate her and you could do anything that you wanted to do it seems like, and it only grew when she met her oldest soon father. She feels that once the introduction of drug selling and drug use came from her surroundings it opened doors for her to want to engage in such activity. She lived a devastating life and it affected her and impacted her life in more than one way.
(4)	In the incident with the shoplifting, I wanted them to boost for me for my own personal gain for me to use such as clothes, shoes and electronics. In relation to me selling dope In reference to her selling drugs it was for the money, but it was also b/c her mom went through a lot of abuse in her relationship and they figured they could save up money and get away. selling and using drugs was her first choice that led to her incarceration, because if this was not a factor she would not have ended up in the situation in which she did
(5)	Drug use was never an influence to go and commit crime, but I did use drugs
(6)	She felt that when going through trial they saw her as this young black women and she did not know any better, she could not afford the attorney that she wanted, and anyone in their right mind knew that she should not have received a life sentence. She did not willingly commit the offenses in which she was incarcerated for. She feels as if they made an example out of her. No one could believe that she received a murder charge for that vehicular accident. In the context of her gender it was like her being a girl and engaging in such activity whether selling or hold or trafficking that she was a female so therefore she would not go to jail. Then in her mind it secured the idea that she could engage in such activity because she could basically be untouched because she was a female.
(7)	As far as my old client/friend he made the choice to take me to that man (my co-defender) who held me captive and abused me, and placed my in those particular situations. I feel my old client/friend made the choice he did because of money, drugs, and fear. As far as my brothers I don't think that they consciously knew that it would affect her life by involving me in that type of activity. As far as my oldest son's father he had this mentality that all the other drug dealers girlfriends/wives all did it, engaged in using drugs, so she then began to heavily use drugs after she told

	herself that even though she sold it she would not use it
(8)	Yes, her brothers and their friends were big time drug dealers and she was very young maybe 12/13yr old when she would hold drugs around them. Her first son's father was the one she began to traffic drugs for, he was a big time drug dealer as well. Just being in that environment around my family who was involved heavily into selling drugs
(9)	I had dreams and goals, I had gone to cosmetology school , but my actions outside of education just caused me to give up a lot and make different choices
(10)	Faith and children
(11)	I wouldn't have been selling drugs, I would have been changing my surrounding. My family surrounding and teaching it made it difficult to life a different life

Table 7 Emfolla's Life Story

Questions/ Discussion	Participant Response
(1)	Her ex-brother in law had some checks and he told her that he would give her some money if she went into the Winn-Dixie and cashed the checks he had given her. So she went to cash the checks and the sales associate in the store stopped her and asked her where she got the checks because the checks were fraudulent. She did not know that the checks were illegal. She informed the sales associate that and her brother in-law (at the time) had given her the checks. So they all go outside to get him to only find out that he pulled off and left her in the store.
(2)	She was involved in domestic violence dispute with her ex-husband, and to escape his abuse and sexual assault and that environment she got involved with a drug dealer for protection and safety from her ex-husband. Each time she got with her different drug dealers it was when her husband tracked her down.
(3)	She got involved with was in a different place because she moved to Atlanta, she figured psychologically she was drawn to drug dealers for protection and what she couldn't do to a man and the comfortable lifestyle. This second drug dealer that she was involved with was selling drugs up north already. Her charges and convictions she received were because of his actions, he wanted her to be a drug mule and she refused so he got another person to be his drug mule and his mother helped tape the drug to the person who acted as the mule, and the person go caught in the Atlanta airport and because her fingerprints were on the drugs because she handled them at one point and the evidence of unidentified fingerprints was never admitted into court she was charged and convicted for Drug conspiracy and refusing to cooperate with US government in drug case because she didn't want to tell on his mom because she was older. Also her boyfriend told her that if she went in and said nothing that she would not get any prison time because she had no criminal record. She received 7 years for drug conspiracy and 36 months for not cooperating with police all on her first offense. After this time and leaving prison she got into another relationship with a drug dealer who tied to have a drug exchange/deal out of her sister's apartment and the buyers tried to rob her boyfriend and the police were called and she was indicted the police were going to charge her and she then told on her boyfriend than. The boyfriend tried to pin it on her because he knew of her past. She went to court and pled guilty because she figured that as the only thing to do, they police tried to get her to tell on the other parties but she did not know who they were, and she received 36 months.
(4)	The reason for going in and cashing the checks for him was solely for monetary gain, because I was broke and needed to pay my light bill. In regards to drug conspiracy she did it because it was a comfortable, stable environment, a protective environment, her boyfriends at the time influenced her and she would do what they wanted because she loved them.
(5)	No drug use was not a factor in participation on criminal activity
(6)	In the context of race and class when going through the situation she did with her ex-husband law enforcement was not there, it was this notion that these black people were just having a fight, it was not valued that what was happening to her

	<p>was traumatizing her. Looking at it from the community perspective and most of the officers being men that it wasn't valued and looking at her life from a criminal justice side, her drug case was dropped in FL and it was picked up in other counties and she was told that the judge she was going before was called the hanging judge and would give all black persons that came before her time. When thinking about the jury that was there in her case there were jurors picked that had a certain mindset and ones who she feel the prosecutors can play to their advantage. Being in the court room is like a bunch of white people playing with your life, no caring and no value to this black person life. Those in court do not live in the environment of the person they are trying and there is this type of detachment and no connection.</p>
(7)	<p>Her brother in law sent her in the store knowing she had fraudulent checks and her drug dealer boyfriends had her engage in certain illegal activity as well because they all knew she was book smart but not street smart at all. They put her in certain situation because they could. It was all business for them sometimes. her first offense with the fraudulent checks she felt was beyond her control, she was under the impression that it was a third party check and she was just doing her ex-brother in law a favor , because at the time you could chase third party checks. The instance with the drug set was beyond her control. As far as the drug mule incident she could have just not went to the airport and not gotten involved at all, she could have changed her flight and she just did it and felt obligated because she was in a relationship with him, she as his "ride or die" so to speak.</p>
(8)	<p>Yes, my ex-brother in-law in relation to fraudulent checks. As far as the drug conspiracy charge and conviction I was charged for something my current boyfriend at the time something his mother did, He wanted me to be his drug mule but I refused and when the girl he used got caught in the Atlanta airport I did not tell on his mom because she was older and they had my fingerprints. She was really naïve and she thinks that if she was exposed to consequences and other peoples consequences prior to her dealing with a drug dealer than she would have been able to say no or question some of the things she was asked to do because the guys wanted he to do them and she was so tunneled/had tunnel vision. She was so into pleasing the drug dealers because she felt love and gratitude and they were not violent towards her. She should have had limits on what she accepted. Growing up in Miami and seeing some of the drug activities she saw and some things taking place with law enforcement she did not realize that some of the drug activities were illegal. Also during her situation her mom lead an example like if he has money marry him, he has money to take care of you, so basically stick around because you will be taken care of. Her friends also placed those type of people in her life and that's how she got involved with some of the drug dealers that she did.</p>
(9)	<p>I was in college but getting caught and being in the environment that I was I did not finish college. At times it was like I had all this book sense and I no common sense. Since she didn't finish college she feels like if she would have her life would have been different as well.</p>
(10)	<p>Her children helped her get through her time, her family relationships were not good. There only support came when she was with the drug dealers because she</p>

	could provide them with things as well, but when she went to prison they were not there for her
(11)	She would have moved from city she was in, she would not have tried to continue to live in that environment, however she had a stable job and didn't want to lose that. But looking back she would have tried to get work elsewhere. Just honestly speaking she would have just ended her husband's life to avoid the cycle she went through after trying to outrun him.

## 4.2 Data Analysis

As shown in the data collection the researcher started with the participants responses to the interview questions. After the beginning phase of analysis in compiling responses of the interview questions, next was the process of descriptive analysis of the responses and then taking those descriptive analysis and applying coding to the descriptive analysis of the responses.

Table 8 Yolanda's Life History Analysis

Questions	Descriptive Coding	Pattern Coding
(1)	Committed Criminal activity willingly for fun and personal gain.	Non-economic driven activity
(2)	Engaged in criminal activity by force of a co-defender. Engaged in criminal activity because of significant other	Convicted of criminal offense because of others actions.
(3)	Childhood exposure, and family opened the door for criminal activity	Heavy Familial influence
(4)	Stole for personal gain and selling of illegal drugs for monetary gain for family	Economic driven activity for better life
(5)	Drug use was not a factor	No drug use as influence
(6)	Young black women one could be untouched.  Black women did not know any better, SES did not allow for an affordable attorney, made an example out of with sentenced given.	Marginalized black women thrown into prison system, affected by policy
(7)	Client/friend made the choice because of money, drugs, and fear.  Brothers' acts/choices were done not consciously knowing outcome for her.  Oldest son's father Placed her in such an environment purposefully	Familial and significant other impacts beyond their control affected pathways
(8)	Brothers and their friends lifestyle was placed on her at a young age.  First son's father was a big impact on her life decisions as well  Family environment was link to involvement into selling drugs	Family and significant others choices affected their pathways
(9)	Had dreams and goals but actions outside of education just caused her life experience	Environment and others impact ended higher education obtainment
(10)	Faith and children as strength	Religion and children as positive outlet
(11)	Changed her actions/choices, surrounding. Family surrounding and teaching it made it difficult to life a different life	Different life choices for different life outcome

Table 9 Emfolla's Life History Analysis

Questions	Descriptive Coding	Pattern Coding
(1)	Committed criminal activity under false pretenses for economic gain	Economic driven criminal activity
(2)	Engaged in criminal activity for a significant other.	Convicted of criminal offense because of others actions
(3)	To escape abuse got involved with others who were engaged in criminal activity.	Partner abuse driven activity
(4)	Committed illegal activity for quick money.  Committed activity for the sake of significant other	Economic driven activity  Influenced activity
(5)	Drug use was not a factor	No drug use as influence
(6)	Context of race and class when going through the situation with ex-husband law enforcement was not there.  Not valued that what was happening was traumatizing. Justice system prejudice judge and the jury was composed of ones the prosecutors can play to their advantage. The court room there is this type of detachment and no connection. Sentenced very harshly for a first offense	Marginalized black women thrown into prison system, affected by policy
(7)	Ex-Bother in law made the choice for monetary gain  Drug dealer boyfriends made the choices to involve her knowing her lack of knowledge of activity	Familial and significant other impacts beyond their control affected pathways.
(8)	Ex-Brother in law lifestyle was placed on her.  Ex boyfriends' lifestyles was a big impact on her life decisions as well  Abusive ex was the link to drug dealers lifestyle, and family environment was link to stay in that environment	Family and significant others choices affected their pathways
(9)	In college but the environment interrupted college complete college education	Environment and others impact ended higher education obtainment

	Had book sense and no common sense. Not completing college being able to get a better job influenced life choices.	
(10)	Children.	Children as positive outlet
(11)	Changed her surroundings  Thoughts of ending husband's life to avoid the cycle of trying to outrun him.	Different life choices for different life outcome  Engagement in criminal activity to escape life of abuse

After descriptive analysis and pattern coding the women life narratives the data and coding show one thing or various things may have sparked participation at a certain point or age in their life. Looking at the descriptive data it shows that for each participant at some point in their life experiences there were choices and activity that gives such intersectional analysis that focuses on how these formerly incarcerated Black women's lives have challenged mainstream notions of crime and defied simplistic notions about individuals and how they "choose" to participate in crime and subsequently become incarcerated. By using life history methodology, and descriptively analyzing the women's responses the analysis illustrates the complexity of Black women's lives in economically, abusive, racialized, gendered, and disenfranchised contexts.

Each question posed to the two participants of the study aligns right along the framework of Black feminist thought to understand some of the deeper socio-structural causes of the rapid increase in Black women's incarceration, and provide the relevant context for understanding the race, sexual, gender, and class oppressions that contribute to African American women's experiences with imprisonment, as well as the overall research question. The researcher pursued to understand the participants experiences from their own personal narratives. By posing such interview questions the researcher was able to gain answers as to what impacting and influenced



their lives both growing up and into adulthood. How their community, environment, peers, family, significant others, and decision both within and beyond their control affected their lives whether positively or negatively and led to their individual pathways. Table 10 shows the data of the women's life narratives in the context of Black Feminist Thought framework and how they addressed the research question at hand.

Table 10 Participant's Life History Relation to the Framework and Research Question

<b>Black Feminists Thought</b>	<b>Research Question</b>
<p>The descriptive analysis and coded data speaks to my theoretical framework without a doubt. All of data speaks to the personal and surrounding factors that lead each participant down the paths in which they had taken. The participants' responses does exactly what the research was intended to do. Not only does it exploring how the interlocking oppressions of race, class and gender affected their trajectories and life choices, it sheds light on demographic data the researcher collected. It gives voice to the criminal demographic information that lays out their criminal background. The analysis and coding of their life histories finds that voice that expresses a self-defined black woman's standpoint for each participant. The analysis and coding through Black feminist thought framework explores the levels that each women experience the oppressions within their lives. Although each individual women has a unique personal biography made up of concrete experiences, values, motivations, and emotions, and no two individuals occupy the same social space, the analysis explores life experiences and personal narratives of each women showing how race, class, gender, and sexuality intersect with both similarities and differences unique to each women's life to influence African American female pathways into crime.</p>	<p>As far as my research question is concerned which focuses on exploring the participant's personal narratives, the analysis and coding helps to understand some of the deeper socio-structural causes of the rapid increase in Black women's incarceration, and provide the relevant context for understanding the race, sexual, gender, and class oppressions that contribute to African American women's experiences with imprisonment. By exploring each woman's unique path and experience the responses explored the impact of neoliberal policies, in areas such as crime control and social factors that influence and impact criminal activity and sentencing for Black women. As well as focused on describing the influences, both personal and by others that impacted their lives, familial and environmental influences, and how actual convictions came about as depicted in the narratives of formally incarcerated Black women.</p>

### **4.3 Chapter Summary**

Chapter four presented the life methodology used to operationalize intersectionality. Black Feminist Thought is used as the theoretical framework to describing the multiplicative relationships among various, simultaneous oppressions unique to black women (Collins, 2013). Using this descriptive model, the relative significance of race, gender, class, or sexuality in determining the conditions of black women's lives is neither fixed nor absolute but, rather, is dependent on the socio-historical context and the social phenomenon under consideration (King 1988, 49). The study explored by way of narrative inquiry, the stories of experiences by engaging in conversation with the two women, and through conversational interview techniques explore the interwoven impact of family life, peer interactions, community impact, economics, education, thoughts on race, class, and gender as its impacts as a Black women, the personal choice and non-personal choices in the lives of each women that impacted their lives and led to this pathway of criminality.

### **4.4 Chapter Conclusion**

Chapter 4 analyzed the results of the descriptive analysis and pattern coding that were drawn from the women's life histories. The intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality were operationalized and revealed evidence that racial demographics, criminal demographics, and educational attainment, familial, significant others, and environment among two Black women's live impacted their pathway into criminality. As well as revealed their take on the effects of neoliberal policies which impacted the black women's length of sentencing. The chapter discussed multiple reasons for the outcomes with support from the literature. Chapter 5 concluded with recommendation for future research and the implications of qualitatively

analyzing the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality and neoliberal policies impact of pathway into criminality for African American women.

## **5 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study conducted both qualitative and quantitative analysis using descriptive and pattern coding models to operationalize the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and impact of changes in neoliberal policies on crime. Chapter 5 discusses the conclusion from the study as well as its implications for further research.

Conducting a mixed methods study of intersecting oppressions and public policy provided an opportunity to both understand the statistical significance of intersectionality on number of women imprisoned and types of crime committed, and also explore their personal accounts to the experience that led to criminal activity and incarceration. This study researched the concern of mass incarceration from a black feminist perspective by exploring the impact of educational attainment, median income, and county racial demographics on length of sentence among black and tries to give understanding the intersections, by way of personal life histories, of race, class, gender, and sexuality in African American women's lives and the way public policy intervenes in their pathways to crime and incarceration. Chapter 5 discusses the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research on intersectionality, Black women, and criminology.

### **5.1 Findings**

This thesis concluded with mixed results, both similar and different analysis of the women life stories, which was expected. In addition to descriptive analysis and pattern coding for the women's responses in the interview, similar and contrasting data and coding was compared based on their criminal demographics and convictions. What was revealed first from

the criminal demographics is that each women although similar in racial identity, they had differences in age, marital status, both childhood and adulthood neighborhood demographics, number of arrest, and type of crimes committed and time served. From the criminal coding each participant was convicted and served time for different criminal offenses. While they are continuously grouped into this marginalized group each woman's pathway its very own unique story behind the action taken and choices made both willingly and unwillingly.

Next was the descriptive analysis and pattern coding of the women's responses during the interview process. These models looked act taking what the participants express from their personal life experiences and what they have encountered dealing with crime, engagement in criminal activity, influences for other, what engaging in criminal activity was for them in the and how their race, class, gender and public policy impacted them both in and outside the black community. The descriptive analysis was to take their in-depth interview responses and create a type of descriptive coding that summarizes in a word or short phrase-most often as a noun-the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data, in this case create a short phrase for the responses to the interview questions. The pattern coding on categories was based upon the descriptive analysis of the participants' responses. Looking at the results of the pattern coding it shows how some of the women's responses have similar pattern coding based on their descriptive analysis and differences as well. Considering the pattern coding the findings suggest that there can be completely different childhood experiences, neighborhood experiences, household experiences, ways in growing up, ways in which crime was of exposure between participants that can yield similar pattern outcomes. There can be a difference in who were influences or what personal different decisions and actions were taken that lead to a path of criminality. It shows that not all of those factors are pushed upon an offender, yet it can be a personal self-imposed choice to

commit crime as well. Furthermore, considering the literature the disadvantages and factors discussed in the literatures proved to be the exact case in some aspects in the lives of the two participants. Conclusions from this study did find some evidence that race and class impacts length of sentence for black women. As well as impacts some of the experiences and decisions the women faced. Furthermore, the cumulative effects of race, class, gender, and sexuality, in criminal activity, and public policy on the impact of longer sentencing are revealed in the responses of the women's life history. One has a better understanding of not just what these women did on paper and how much time they served, but also story behind how and why criminal activity took place, in what context, and under what circumstances. The purpose of this study was to address the issue of mass incarceration for in terms of African American women, and to explore and give voice to their life histories to better understand the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality in African American women's lives and the way public policy intervenes in their pathways to crime and incarceration. A descriptive analysis and pattern coding of the sample revealed the stories behind the women who served time in prison.

## **5.2 Implications and Recommendations**

Findings from this study have implications for future research on understanding the roles race, class sexuality, and gender have in contributing to the mass incarceration of black women, as well as the impact of neoliberal policies and its impact on sentencing. This study expanded research by qualitatively and quantitatively analyzing the intersections of Black women's oppressions to give voice and make clear a Black women's standpoint to their stories and to address black women's length of sentence, that is most often times affected by mandatory sentencing laws. Through this study, several factors were descriptively analyzed and new factors for future analysis emerged. The women's personal and criminal demographic data was analyzed

and compared to see the similarities and differences between these characteristics of the women of the sample. This analysis gave provided the information to see what type of women they are and the type of women who are indeed being imprisoned and becoming victims of the criminal justice system. The women's types of crime, and length of sentencing were analyzed and showing the various criminal activity that Black women are indeed engaging in and the time that is being served, These findings can also allow more space for the development of research centered on African American women within the academy.

The outcome of this thesis can serve Criminology by incorporating race, class, sexuality, and gender into the discourse. The descriptive models showed connections between the oppressions and factors that Black women face and experience, and how these intersections within their lives told through their own stories show the impact and influences on the pathway chosen and lived. Therefore, understanding crime and its impact on various communities necessitates an intersectionality approach. This study also adds to the African American studies discipline by qualitatively and quantitatively measuring the impact of intersectionality as well as other variables such as the impact of familial and significant other influence, abuse and substance abuse, environmental influences, and type of offenses committed. By descriptively measuring and applying coding to women's life histories it is necessary to develop new theories and understanding of the impact or lack thereof of how life experiences of criminal activity in relation to the African American women has various meanings and can be seen as window to speak about what type of lifestyles that was lived, influences, and choices made. Crime is much more than the conviction and time served for these women voice needs to be given to the women's stories.

This study combined black feminist thought and criminology theory as a basis for understanding black women's unique relationship with the penal system. This study recommends that more scholars incorporate different variables and descriptively test present theories. This will provide alternative explanations and understandings of mass incarceration and its relationship with black women. This thesis reveals that black women have varying factors that have influenced or impacted their decisions that led to their pathway into criminal activity. As well as show how the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality is viewed in the context of their criminal activity. Along with the implications of public policy and its impact on longer sentences for these women. The study addresses the traditional understandings of the impact race, class, gender and public policy have on predicting engagement in criminal activity and on the length of sentence for black women, and opens the door for understanding the personal accounts of the women's experience with the criminal justice system. This study challenges the belief that race, class and gender unquestionably have an impact on criminal engagement for Black women, as well as an impact on the length of sentence for black women and complicates the discussion of intersectionality. Scholars must expand their analysis of such intersections and include qualitative narrative work in examining its impact on criminality for Black women. This type of study can broaden the utility and range of Black Feminist and Criminology theories in a way that will expand both the African American and Criminology disciplines and enrich the discourse on mass incarceration. Qualitatively analyzing current African theories and incorporating Criminological thought will re-define and extend traditional understanding.

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## APPENDICES

Georgia State University  
Department of African American Studies  
Informed Consent

Title: **Black Women, Incarceration, and Criminal Activity**

Principal Investigator: Maurice Hobson

Student Principal Investigator: Rachelle Stewart

### **Why is this research being done?**

You are asked to take part in a research study. This study looks at life experiences and personal stories of African American women who have been in prison. The research looks at how race, class, gender, and sexuality connect to influence African American female pathways into crime. By looking at important issues and exploring other social factors (i.e. (dangerous over-use of drugs), sexual (very mean, unfair treatment), broken family relations, and violent and cruel intimate relationships) through the women's personal stories, the goal is to show how those factors add to knowing more than just what they went to prison for, but why there is this cycle--of hurting or blaming someone and criminal behavior. You are asked to participate because you are an African American woman who has been arrested for criminal activities either drug related, violent, or non-violent, which lead to jailing, but has since been released within the last 20 to 30 years. A total of 4-6 people will be asked to join this study.

### **Who is being asked to take part in this research study?**

People asked to take part in this study must be between 18-60 years of age, and must have been released from prison within the last 20 to 30 years. You must have been arrested for a drug-related, violent, or non-violent crime, and served time in jail or state/federal prison. The study will include 4-6 people from the United States, more specifically the Atlanta, Georgia area and surrounding cities.

### **What procedures will be done for research purposes?**

If you decide to take part in this research study, you will complete a background survey and an in-person interview. Participation will involve a time commitment of 1-2 hours on a single day to complete both the survey and interview. If more time is needed for the interview, it may continue during one or two extra meetings of 1-2 hours each, depending on how long it takes to tell your personal stories. The interview will be audio recorded. The study will take place in a meeting room at the ForeverFamily's headquarters.

### **What are the possible risks, side effects, and discomforts of this research study?**

There are minor risks connected with this research study. It is possible that you may not want to answer certain questions. If you feel uncomfortable with a question, you can skip that question or

### **What are possible benefits from taking part in this study?**

You most likely will not receive a straight benefit from taking part in this research study. However, participation in this study may benefit you in that it will provide a greater picture of your group in discussions of black women, criminal behavior, abuse, and imprisonment.

### **Will I be paid if I take part in this research study?**

You will not receive any compensation for your participation in this study.

### **Who will know about my participation in this research study?**

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Only the Principal investigator and Student Principal Investigator will have the right to use to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)). We will use password safe folders that will hold your written data as well as audio recorded data. These password safe folders will only be opened on electronic devices owned and used only by the Principal investigators. No other person will have access to the data. Your name and other facts that relate directly to you will appear when we present this study or publish its results. If you do not want your birth names recorded, false names may be used. Below please choose an option on how you want this identifying data to addressed. In the interview, you are encouraged to avoid providing possible identifying information about persons other than yourself. This is because there will be no way for any person besides you, the participant, to consent to identifying data being shared in the study. If identifiable data is obtained from your narratives regarding persons other than yourself (such as birth names, relationships, and other details), the identifying information will be removed from the data set and will be de-identified when reporting the findings. Upon completion of the study I will inform you that the data will be held for at least 1-3 years in case of any re-visitation to the data if needed. After this time frame, the data will be deleted and erased from the researchers' electronic device(s), as well as the hard copies destroyed.

### **Is my participation in this research study voluntary?**

Your participation is voluntary; you are free to remove yourself from this study at any time. If you do not want to continue, you can simply end the interview and not fill out the questionnaire/survey. If you choose to end the interview/complete the questionnaire/survey, your answers and participation will not be recorded. You also may choose to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

### **How the findings will be used:**

The results of the study will be used for scholarly purposes only. The results from the study will be presented in educational settings and at professional conferences, and the results might be published in a professional journal in the field of African American Studies.

**Contact information:**

Contact Rachelle Stewart at (706) 495-8191 and/or rstewart17@student.gsu.edu if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, obtain information, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

Copy of Consent Form to Participant:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded, please check one of the following options and sign below.

I agree to have my real name and identifying information about me included when the research is reported.

Please use a false name and remove identifying information about me when the research is reported.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B Measurement

### Demographics Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Where were you born, city/state?
3. Where were you raised, city/state?
4. Where do you reside now, city/state?
5. What is your race/ethnicity?
  - a. Black/African American
  - b. Black/Other
  - c. White
  - d. Asian
  - e. Other
6. What is your religious affiliation?
  - a. Christian/Baptist
  - b. Muslim
  - c. Jewish
  - d. Agnostic
  - e. Other
7. What is your marital status?
  - a. Married
  - b. Separated
  - c. Divorced
  - d. Single
8. Identify your sexual orientation identity.

- a. Heterosexual
- b. Bi-sexual
- c. Lesbian
- d. Other

9. How many children do you have?

- a. 5 or more
- b. 4
- c. 3
- d. 2
- e. 1
- f. None

10. What is the highest level of education you have obtained?

- a. Less than high school
- b. High school
- c. Some college
- d. Associates
- e. Bachelor's
- f. Master's
- g. PhD

11. Have you been arrested for either a drug-related, non-violent, violent crime (circle all that apply if yes)?

- a. Yes
- b. No

12. If yes, what was the charge and how many times?

13. Have you been convicted for either a drug-related, non-violent, violent crime (circle all that apply if yes)?

- a. Yes
- b. No

14. If yes, what was the offense and how much time did you serve?

15. Name the county(s), city(ies)/state(s) in which the institution(s) is(are) located where you served time.

16. Did you serve time in jail, prison, or both (circle which applies)?

- a. Yes
- b. No

17. If jail for what charges, and long for each charge (if only for holding please specify)?

18. If prison for what charges, and long for each charge?

19. Are you currently employed?

- a. Yes
- b. No

20. Have you ever been unemployed (voluntarily or involuntarily) before being incarcerated?

- a. Yes
- b. No

21. If so, for how long?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_

22. If just finding recent employment, do you plan to work continuously upon obtaining a new job?



- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. N/A

23. Have you ever been on any type of welfare program before incarceration?

- a. Yes
- b. No

24. If yes to the above question please specify.

25. Have you ever used any illegal substance?

- a. Yes
- b. No

26. In a few words describe the neighborhood in which you grew up.

27. In a few words describe the neighborhood that you currently reside.

28. Were you ever a victim of domestic abuse?

- a. Yes
- b. No

29. When you were a child (age 18 or younger) were you abused by an adult?

- a. Yes
- b. No

30. When you were a child (age 18 or younger) were you seriously physically hurt

- a. Yes
- b. No

31. As a child were you exposed to various criminal activity?

- a. Yes
- b. No

## Appendix C Measurement

### Survey Questions

1. What was your first encounter with the criminal justice system (age, place, specific time in your life)?
2. Drug use was an influence of participation of criminal activity? If yes, how
3. What did you expect to yield from committing the crime, if committed willingly?
4. If not committed willingly what was the other party expecting to obtain?
5. Does the environment you grew up in have an influence on your will to commit crime, if so why?
6. Do you feel that social restraints and disadvantages of being African American led to your path of criminality, if so why?
7. Were you influenced by others around you, friends and/or family to commit criminal acts
8. If willingly, did you commit \_\_\_\_\_ crime because it was (Easy, Comfortable, Convenient, or Other)?
9. If not willingly, why was the crime committed?
10. Based on your answer top question 9 or 10, give a brief description of why was it \_\_\_\_\_
11. If willingly, did you engage in \_\_\_\_\_ criminal activity because it was (Thrilling, For money, Stability, Other)
12. If not willingly, why was the crime committed?
13. Based in your answer in questions 11 or 12, give a brief description of why was it \_\_\_\_\_
14. What is your take on crime in relation to the African-American female? (i.e. do you feel that guilt should automatically be placed on the women)
15. Considering your experience with criminal activity, how do you view your experience, do you see yourself as bring guilty of committing the crimes in which you were convicted of?
16. How do you think being a black woman growing up in \_\_\_\_ influenced your criminal involvement or others around you to involve you in criminal activity?
17. What personal choices did you make that contributed to your incarceration? Why did you make those choices?
18. What choices did other people make that contributed to your incarceration? Why do you think they made those choices?
19. What choices beyond your control contributed to your incarceration? Why were they beyond your control?
20. What factors/things helped you get through incarceration?
21. How do you think you education level contributed to your incarceration?
22. Looking back on your incarceration experience would you do anything differently? If so, what?