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REFLECTIONS OF SELF:
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY
EXPLORING A SURVIVIOR'S JOURNEY TO HEALING

by

Shemika M. Harris

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Major Counseling

The University of Memphis

December 2011

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to every child who has experienced child abuse.

Forgiveness of self opens the heart for healing.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to my doctoral dissertation committee, Dr. Ronnie Priest, Dr. Nancy Nishimura, Dr. Stephen Leierer, and Dr. Lisbeth Berbary for their support in this endeavor. I appreciate my dissertation committee's contributions of time, ideas, and expertise in making my doctoral experience productive, stimulating, and rewarding. I thank them for their encouragement and their support. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Dr. Ronnie Priest for serving as my doctoral dissertation chair, teacher, and mentor. As my dissertation chair I would like to say thank you for coordinating and overseeing the administrative aspects regarding my dissertation requirements. As my teacher, I would like to say thank you for igniting the fire within to learn more about my ethnicity and culture. As my mentor, I appreciate the guidance you have provided along this journey, and encouragement to finish the race.

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I owe my deepest gratitude to friends, family, and co-workers who have supported me throughout this journey. I am thankful to these individuals who have supported me and consistently helped me maintain perspective on what is important in life and focused on completing this goal. I am thankful for my family for supporting me throughout this

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Abstract

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This study exposed the ramifications of childhood sexual abuse in regards to an African American woman's self-representation by contextualizing this experience within the larger cultural context; thereby, illuminating issues regarding race, class, gender, and relationships with others. Framed within a feminist theoretical paradigm, this study integrated the sociological context of race and culture using Black Feminist thought (Collins, 2000) and Relational Cultural Theory, which examines women's psychological identity development (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1976). To illustrate an African American woman's negotiation of existence as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, this qualitative study employed the research methodology autoethnography. Employing autoethnography provides individuals primarily studied by members of the dominant culture the opportunity to study their own experience. This is especially important when exploring the topic of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse poses methodological concerns for researchers because of the topic's sensitive nature (Ellis & Bochner, 2003; Mendis, 2009). Investigating the impact of sexual abuse is warranted as it gives voice to the survivor's experience; thereby, liberating the survivor. Yet, it is important to note the hegemonic relationship between the researcher and survivor, since the researcher is contextualizing the information through her eyes (Lister, 2003). Through the researcher's contextualization the survivor transitions back into a victim position. Therefore, "survivor discourse about sexual abuse then may be far from "liberatory", as the survivor discloses her innermost experiences to an expert, who then reinterprets the

experiences using dominant codes of normality” (Lister, 2003, p. 47). By employing an autoethnographic approach, I am negotiating this hegemonic relationship by serving as the researcher and participant. As the participant I am describing an experience that once victimized me. As the researcher I am contextualizing my journey as a survivor, more specifically, investigating how this experience affected my sense of self, perception of others, and my relationships. With a deeper understanding of self and others, autoethnography can be a very empowering method of inquiry. Autoethnographies can bring “voice” to those marginalized in society and bring coherence for individuals seeking to understand how past experiences have influenced their life and identity (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Living in a residence hall or dormitory is an experience of its own. I live in a dorm with two white females. They seem really nice but I feel like I'm in their space, much like an intruder. I met another black girl in my dormitory name Alisa. Alisa is from a small hometown like me, but a couple of years older. A room became available so we became roommates. She is very sweet; loves to sing, but we have one problem. She will not clean. I come from a home where I cleaned and refused to live in filth. I often clean the apartment while she lounges on the sofa reading a book.

Alisa and I hang out a lot. I want to become more active on campus; although, Alisa is totally content with relaxing in our cozy apartment. My daily routine consists of class and working out. I'm really familiar with the party scene since Alisa doesn't like to party. I have met a couple of my classmates outside of class, but I don't consider any of those individuals as friends. I'm really missing home right now. I like my school, but there so many people here that I feel like another number. I feel useless and I feel alone.

Before I left for college, Marshall, my best friend, predicted I would lose my virginity my first year of college like the people we saw on television. Of course, I totally disagree with Marshall. During my freshman year of high school, I made the decision to remain a virgin until I marry. My virginity is under lock and key, although I had been in those situations. The situations when the guy expected to "seal the deal". Yet, I always say no. It's kind of funny,

maybe ironic that I have this belief because its not like my parents had this expectation for me. My parents did not discuss sex with me, or any matter relating to sex or reproduction. Anything dealing with sex I had to learn on my own. My mother never purchased bras for me I did that for myself. When I got my menstrual cycle, I figured that process out on my own. The process of a woman getting pregnant? I learned that on my own as well. I could only assume my parents thought I knew these golden nuggets of information. Well, I learned what I needed to know. Besides, after the sexual abuse, I became more afraid of sex. I refuse to allow a man to use me for sex, and then discard me after he is finished. You see I may have low self-esteem, but I still have values. I am not going to have sex until I am married. At least my husband would understand my inhibition in the bedroom.

.....

Narrative Background of Study

The preceding excerpt is from a text about my life. A text, unbeknownst to me, that would serve as a canvas for me to illustrate the experiences that have shaped my definition of self. In addition, this text has served as the catalyst for my healing from childhood sexual abuse. Hence, the proposed topic of my research will address the impact of sexual violence, more specifically, childhood sexual abuse (CSA) on African American women's development of self. As the participant in this research study I am describing an experience that once victimized me, and as the researcher I am contextualizing my journey as a survivor and investigating how this experience affected my sense of self, how I viewed others, and my relationships. This contextualization will

explore the role of culture; more specifically address the impact of race, socio-economic class, gender, and cultural values in shaping my self-representation. Therefore, the following section will provide a brief overview of sexual abuse; more specifically, the long term impact of this trauma on the survivor's sense of self.

Childhood Sexual Abuse

According to the summary key findings of *Child Maltreatment in 2008* child protective agencies across the United States received over 3.3 million reported cases of children being abused or neglected (USDHHS, 2008). Child Protective Services estimated that 772,000 (10.3 per 1,000) children were victims of child abuse and neglect (USDHHS, 2008), with approximately nine percent (69,480) of those cases being victims of childhood sexual abuse (USDHHS, 2008). Additionally, the report stated (USDHHS, 2008) that African American children had higher rates of child maltreatment (16.6 per 1,000 children) and rates of victimization for girls (10.8 per 1,000 children) were slightly higher than boys (9.7 per 1,000 children).

Bynum et al. (2010) studied adverse childhood experiences of adults across five states and found that 12.2 % of the respondents (n = 26,229) experienced childhood sexual abuse. Approximately one out of three women and one out of seven men will be sexually victimized before 18 years of age (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1990). A comprehensive national study of 2,030 children ages 2-17 found that the majority of sexual encounters were committed by acquaintances (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005).

Roughly 90% of children who were victims of sexual abuse knew their perpetrator and 68% of sexual abuse victims were molested by a member of their family

(Abel & Harlow, 2002). Father-daughter and stepfather-daughter incest is most commonly reported, with most of the remaining reports consisting of mother/stepmother-daughter/son incest (RAINN, 2008). Families in poverty are susceptible to social problems (Derezotes & Snowden, 1990) such as sexual abuse; however many studies do not include information regarding socio-economic status thus contributing to the inability to understand the contextual role of socio-economic class and the risk of sexual abuse (Kenny & McEachern, 2000; USDHHS, 2010).

Studies on social environment and severity of abuse indicate African American girls living in dangerous and poor communities are at an increased risk for being sexually abused (Black, Heyman, & Smith, 2001). It should be noted that the likelihood of reporting the abuse as well as characteristics of CSA, circumstances around the abuse, and impacts of CSA may be dissimilar for different racial groups (Powell, 1988; Russell, Schurman, & Trocki., 1988; Sanders-Phillips, Moisan, Waldington, Morgan, & English, 1995). To illustrate these aspects, the following section will discuss the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse with African American women.

African American Women

Research has shown that African American women may experience an incident with sexual abuse before the age of eight (West, Williams, & Siegel, 2000). Studies report wide variations of sexual abuse with African American women with prevalence rates ranging from 11% to 62% (Wyatt & Peters, 1986). The estimate of childhood sexual cases involving African American women is conflicting, although it is assumed to be comparable to White Americans. Wyatt (1985) found no significant difference between African American women and White women in regards to experience with sexual abuse.

In a study of African American college students Priest (1992) found that 25% of the female respondents reported being sexually abused before the age of 17. In a sample of low-income African American women in San Francisco (Wingood & DiClemente, 1997) and Baltimore (Banyard, 1999) approximately 14% reported a history of childhood sexual abuse. In a community sample of African American women in Los Angeles, one-third of the surveyed residents were victims of childhood sexual abuse (Wyatt, Loeb, Solis, Carmona, & Romero, 1999). Hence, the studies reflect that sexual abuse is a traumatic experience known to African American women as well.

Wyatt's (1985) study indicated that African American girls were at risk for being abused in their homes by another African American male, a perpetrator from the nuclear family or extended family. Pierce and Pierce (1984) found that African American children were more likely to be sexually abused by uncles and less likely by biological fathers. Studies have revealed that African American girls were more vulnerable to severe forms of violence, such as vaginal, anal, or oral penetration (West, 2002; Wyatt et al, 1999). Lindholm and Willey (1986) found that in comparison to white girls, African American girls and Hispanic girls were more likely to be forced to participate in sexual intercourse. However, Wyatt's (1990) study found no difference in types of sexual behavior or severity in African Americans and Caucasians. Shaw, Lewis, Loeb, Rosado, & Rodriguez (2001) found that African American girls experienced more vaginal penetration in comparison to Hispanic girls.

Wyatt, et al's (1999) found that in a sample of African American women (n = 182) and Caucasian women (n = 156) African American women reported childhood sexual abuse involving attempted or completed oral sex, anal sex, or rape. Tzeng and

Schwarzin's (1990) study determined that African American children were most frequently abused by their parents' boyfriend or girlfriend. Due to the shift in the marital patterns in the African American community, African American children are exposed to males who are not their biological father; therefore, African American girls reared in homes without their biological father may have higher risk of child victimization than African American girls reared both biological parents (Abney & Priest, 1995).

Quantitative and qualitative studies have investigated the experiences of childhood sexual abuse in African American women. These studies have examined or explored the long-term consequences of childhood sexual abuse which may manifest as psychological and behavioral problems. For example, studies on African American women have identified a correlation between CSA and prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases, and multiple sex partners (Austin, Roberts, Corliss, & Molmar, 2008; Miner, Flitter, & Robinson, 2006; Wingood & DiClemente, 1997). Issues with depression and anxiety have also been found in CSA samples including African American women (Banyard, Williams, & Siegel, 2001; Banyard, Siegel, Williams, & West, 2002; Bryant-Davis, Ulman, Tsong, Tillman, & Smith, 2010; Mennen, 1995; Rabon, 1994; Sanders-Phillips, et al, 1995; Shaw; et al, 2001).

Research has also indicated a correlation between CSA, depression, and interpersonal relationships and interpersonal violence. For example, McGuigan and Middlemiss (2005) found in a community sample of African American women, participants who experienced CSA and interpersonal violence displayed the highest number of depressive symptoms in comparison to women with no history of CSA or interpersonal violence. Liang, Williams, and Siegel's (2006) longitudinal study of

African American women (n = 136) found a relationship between severe sexual trauma and greater marital dissatisfaction. Existing studies report problems with anxiety, PTSD, and revictimization among African American women survivors of CSA (Barnes, Noll, Putnam & Trickett, 2009; Bryant-Davis, et al, 2010; Classen, Field, Koopman, Nevill-Manning, & Spiegel, 2001; Classen, Nevo, Koopman, Nevill-Manning, Gore-Felton, Rose, & Spiegel, 2002; Clear, Vincent, & Harris, 2006; Leifer & Shapiro, 1995; Mennen, 1995; Owens & Chard, 2003). The current literature has detailed issues with substance abuse, suicidal ideation, and feelings of guilt and shame among African American women survivors of CSA (Anderson, Tiro, Price, Bender, & Kaslow, 2002; Ehrim, 2002; Erdmans & Black, 2008; Jasinski, Williams, & Siegel, 2001; Nehls & Sallmann, 2005; Sarin & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2010; Thompson, Kaslow, Lane & Kingree, 2000; Wingood & DiClemente, 1997; Zinzow, Seth, Jackson, Niehaus, & Fitzgerald, 2010).

A conceptual framework frequently referenced to explore the negative consequences of childhood sexual abuse is Finkelhor & Brown's (1985) Traumagenic Dynamic Model. This model espoused that the stigmatization of childhood sexual abuse can cause feelings of guilt and shame, suicide, substance abuse, and delinquency. In addition, Finkelhor and Brown (1985) found that these characteristics were connected to the survivor's representation of self, which encompasses the multiple aspects of self; therefore, the following section will provide additional insight into this area.

Self-Representation

The impact of CSA can have long-term consequences on the survivor resulting in prolonged issues that may disrupt the woman's life. The preceding literature denotes the psychological impact of CSA; however, one area that deems further exploration is the

impact of CSA on the survivor's self-representation. According to Finkelhor (1988) sexual abuse altered the child's view of self and view of the world, and interfered with the survivor's ability to develop a positive sense of self (Duncan, 2004). Corbett (1996) used the term self-representation in her study of childhood sexual abuse survivors to represent the different aspects of self, such as self-esteem, self-concept, behavioral and interpersonal aspects. Therefore, the term self-representation will be used in this study to examine multiple aspects of self in survivors of childhood sexual abuse, and the following studies will provide a brief overview on the literature regarding the multiple aspects of self in survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

Bruce-Moritt's (1997) quantitative study investigated the relationship between childhood sexual abuse and ethnic identity development in African American women. This comparison study examined 32 women with a history of childhood sexual abuse and 54 non-abused women to determine if experiences of CSA impacted the development and quality of ethnic identity in later adulthood. Bruce-Morrit's study did not confirm the hypotheses predicating a significant relationship between a history of childhood sexual abuse and an endorsement of Pre-Encounter attitudes or Immersion/Emersion attitudes in adulthood.

Ackard and Neumark-Sztainer (2002) study examined associations between date violence, rape, disordered eating behaviors, and psychopathology in adolescents. A Minnesota school-based sample of 81,247 boys and girls in 9th and 12th grades completed the 1998 Minnesota Student Survey. A majority of the participants (60%) were in the 9th grade, and were White (90.3% of girls, 89.3% boys). Ackard and Neumark-Sztainer (2002) found that adolescents who had been sexually assaulted

reported lower levels of self-esteem as compared to adolescents who had not experienced sexual assault. Although this study lends insight into past sexual assault and self-esteem, African American women were not represented in this sample.

Neville, Heppner, Oh, Spainerman, and Clark (2004) examined the *Culturally Inclusive Ecological Model of Sexual Assault Recovery (CIEMSAR)* model among 97 (45 Black and 52 White) female student rape survivors participating in an ongoing investigation examining the rape recovery process among college students. The CIEMSAR model depicts the direct and indirect influences of five previously identified components on post rape adjustment: rape context, personal variables, post rape responses, environmental/institutional responses, and cultural variables (Neville et al., 2004), and the interaction of these five components influences women's acute and lasting psychological adjustment. Neville et al. (2004), found that African American female college students exposed to greater levels of sexual violence in their past were more likely to blame themselves for their most recent sexual assault, which in turn related to lower reported self-esteem.

Murthi, Servaty-Seib, and Elliot (2006) studied levels of self-concept between a primarily white nonclinical sample of female college students who were CSA survivors and a sample of nonabused peers. Self-concept was a multi-dimensional construct consisting of the six domains: familial, affect, competence, physical, academic, and social. CSA survivors scored lower scores than non-abused peers in the areas of familial, affect, competence, and physical. Researchers (Murthi et al., 2006) attributed high scores in self concept in the areas of social and academic domains to the participants' possible successful integration into the university system and resilience. Although the sample did

not include African American women, the study sheds light on the importance of using a multidimensional approach in assessing CSA survivors' self-concept, because CSA survivors may exhibit resilience and high functioning in certain aspects of their lives, but may be struggling in other areas of their lives.

Mousavi (2006) investigated the relationship between racial identity and overall quality of life among Black women survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). Mousavi's research investigated Black women's experiences with childhood sexual abuse and the potential protective factors that serve as buffers; thereby, enhancing the quality of life of CSA survivors. Racial identity was measured by the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) and Quality of life (QOL) was measured by World Health Organization Quality of Life-Brief version (WHOQOL-BREF). In a sample size of 85 Black women survivors of CSA the study found that the Self-Hatred subscale of the CRIS accounted for significant variance (9%) in overall QOL. Therefore the need for exploration in the area of racial self-hatred among Black women survivors of CSA was recommended.

In my literature search, I identified a qualitative study which explored the multiple aspects of self or self-representation in survivors of childhood sexual abuse (Corbett, 1996). In a phenomenological study Corbett (1996) described the working representations of self, others, and relationships in women sexually abused as children by prominent male figures. This study included seven participants, six which were Caucasian and one being of Aboriginal decent. Through phenomenological interviews, Corbett assessed multiple aspects of self, such as: self-concept, self-esteem, interpersonal/behavioral aspects of self as well as the multiple aspects of survivors' representations of others and relationships. Using content analysis the following themes

were extracted regarding the women's representation of self: a) low self-worth; (b) lack of knowledge of self; (c) confusion about female identity; (d) distorted body image; (e) disrupted sexuality; and (f) biased perceptions of the world. The themes regarding the women's representations of others included (a) disrupted relationships with men; (b) revictimization; (c) disrupted relationships with women; and (d) distorted and generalized representations of others.

Statement of the Problem

The stigmatization of sexual abuse manifested through self-injurious behavior, delinquency and suicide ideation which have been extensively studied in African American women. However the cause of the behavior, poor self-representation, has garnered little research. The literature examining the impact of CSA and self-representation through a quantitative paradigm investigated one-dimensional aspects of self, such as self-esteem (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002; Neville et al., 2004) or ethnic identity (Bruce-Moritt, 1997). Murthi et al. (2006) exploration of self-concept among the various domains revealed the importance of a multi-dimensional examination of self-concept; however, the sample lacked African American women. Mousavi's (2006) study of racial identity development and quality of life attempted to bridge the gap between the multiple domains of self; however, the quantitative study was unable to explain CSA survivors attitudes of self-hatred. An exploration of survivor's experiences and sense of self through a qualitative lens revealed the paucity of studies addressing this topic, more specifically with African American women. Corbett (1996) study of survivors' representation of self, others, and relationship highlighted the importance of exploring the multiple aspects of the self, yet it did not contain any African American

women. Research has not examined self-representation of African American women considering the ethnic identity development, self-esteem, and self-concept simultaneously, which are shaped by the African American culture. Exploring the role of culture in shaping the self-representation of African American women CSA survivors will also shed additional insight into the survivors' perception of the experience.

Therefore, the proposed purpose of this dissertation is to describe how my experience with childhood sexual abuse shaped my self-representation by contextualizing the experience within the larger cultural context; thereby, illuminating issues of race, class, gender, and relationships with others. This study will investigate the manner in which the perception of others and relationships shaped my self-representation as an African American woman who survived childhood sexual abuse. In addition, this study will illustrate the multifaceted approach in which an adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse might negotiate her existence in different worlds; by examining the culture that shapes the survivor's representations of self, and the world in which the survivor views herself.

Significance of the Study

First, exploring the topic of sexual abuse poses methodological concerns for researchers because of the topic's sensitive nature (Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Mendis, 2009). From the researcher's perspective (Lister, 2003) investigating sexual abuse is warranted as it gives voice to the survivor's experience, thereby liberating the survivor. Yet, it is important to note the hegemonic relationship between the researcher and survivor, because the researcher is contextualizing the information through her eyes (Lister, 2003). Therefore, as the researcher and participant, I am able to examine this

sensitive topic through multiple lenses. Survivors of childhood sexual abuse, specifically, African American women may find this study valuable, since it is one that details the transition from victim to survivor. The journey of healing from childhood sexual abuse is difficult, but once a woman is able to understand the various social constructs existing in her world she is then in a position to choose how she will define herself (Collins, 2000). In order to connect this autoethnography to the larger discourse addressing self-representation and childhood sexual abuse, this study will be theoretically grounded in Black Feminist Thought as this theory addresses the interaction between large scale social structures and relationships. Through Black Feminist thought I will explore the relationship between the stereotypical images surrounding the African American woman's sexuality; which contributes to the growing trend of African American women engaging in self-blame regarding their own victimization (Taylor, 1998). Therefore, Black Feminist thought will provide the historical and cultural context regarding the interaction between sexual abuse and the African American woman.

Women and men of every ethnicity or class may find this study helpful as this autoethnography will explore my developing, deconstructing, and reconstructing of self through my relationship with others using Relational Cultural Theory. Relational Cultural Theory purports that women are social beings learning from their relationships throughout their life (Miller, 1976) and a woman's self-esteem develops in her relationships with others. The woman's sense of self, emotional health and physical health require connection to other people (Comstock et al., 2008). According to Miller (1976) a woman's sense of self is built around her ability to make and maintain connections. However, when this connection is ruptured there is a loss of relationship,

and possibly a loss of total self (Miller, 1976). Exploring my relationships with self and others may provide insight into survivors' hesitancy to disclose sexual abuse and experiences with revictimization in adulthood. Most importantly, this exploration of self and self-in-relation to others will also illustrate the power of relationships in bringing healing to others.

Definition of Terms

Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA): Abney and Priest (1995) defined sexual abuse as 'the sexual manipulation and/or coercion of a dependent child or adolescent by a dominant authority figure in which the child or adolescent is unable to give informed consent' (p.11). Sexual abuse can take the form of oral-genital contact, genital or anal penetration, genital touching of the victim by the perpetrator, any other touching of private body parts, sexual kissing and hugging; sexually staring at the victim by the perpetrator, accidental or disguised touching of the victim's body by the perpetrator, verbal invitations to engage in sexual activity, verbal ridiculing of body parts, pornographic photography, reading of sexually explicit material to children, and exposure to inappropriate sexual activity (Berger & Thompson, 1998)

Self-representation/Representations of self: Corbett (1996) defined self-representation as the multiple aspects of self, such as: self-concept, self-esteem, ethnic identity, and interpersonal/behavioral aspects of self.

Representation of others and relationships: The descriptions, assumptions, and expectations an individual uses to process information that she encounters in the world, cumulative experiences of one's self in relationships with others. These representations are organizers of subjective experience and are the conduits in which one's perceptions,

interpretations, affective experience, and interactions in the world are filtered (Corbett, 1996, p. 23).

Autoethnography: Used as both a method and a text; “a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context” (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9).

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 through 4 will entail an Introduction, Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, and Methodology. Chapter 1 provided a narrative background for the research and my reasons for choosing to explore representation of self, others, and relationships as it relates to African American women who have survived childhood sexual abuse. Chapter 2 will provide an exhaustive review of the pertinent literature regarding childhood sexual abuse and the long term impacts of the trauma. Chapter 3 will consist of an exposition of the macro-theory Black Feminist thought and mid-level theory, Relational Cultural Theory. Chapter 4 will explicate autoethnography as the research methodology for this study. Chapter 5, 6, and 7 will include the representation. Chapter 8 will discuss the interpretation of the representation connecting the representation experience to themes illuminated in the theoretical framework and related literature. Chapter 9 will provide concluding thoughts and detail the process of healing.

Chapter 2

Related Literature

This chapter will begin with an examination of childhood sexual abuse and the prevalence of this phenomenon among African American women. Next, the Traumagenic Dynamic Model will provide the framework for addressing the negative sequelae of childhood sexual abuse, and will conclude with a review of literature regarding childhood sexual abuse and self-representation.

Childhood Sexual Abuse

Childhood sexual abuse has been identified as an issue transcending all segments of society (Fontes, 1995) regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, or socio-economic class. Abney and Priest (1995) defined sexual abuse as ‘the sexual manipulation and/or coercion of a dependent child or adolescent by a dominant authority figure in which the child or adolescent is unable to give informed consent’ (p.11). Berger and Thompson (1998) defined childhood sexual abuse as any erotic act that pleases an adult inducing various emotions in a child or adolescent-even if consent is given or withheld and no genital contact is involved. Fergusson and Mullen (1999) identified two intersecting but distinct types of interactions that classify as childhood sexual abuse, including (1) forceful and coercive sexual behavior imposed on a child, and (2) sexual activity-whether or not coercion is used-occurring between a child and older individual where there is a five-year age discrepancy or more between the victim and perpetrator.

Sexual abuse can take the form of oral-genital contact, genital or anal penetration, genital touching of the victim by the perpetrator, any other touching of private body parts, sexual kissing and hugging; sexually staring at the victim by the perpetrator, accidental or

disguised touching of the victim's body by the perpetrator, verbal invitations to engage in sexual activity, verbal ridiculing of body parts, pornographic photography, reading of sexually explicit material to children, and exposure to inappropriate sexual activity (Berger & Thompson, 1998). West (2002) identified sexual abuse involving a child and a babysitter, neighbor, or authority figure such as a coach, teacher, or clergy as extrafamilial abuse and sexual abuse involving a father, uncle, or brother as intrafamilial or incest (RAINN, 2008). Incest is defined as sexual contact between persons so closely related that their marriage is illegal (RAINN, 2008), sexual interaction between family members who are not marital partners, and the sexual victimization of children by family members (Vender Mey & Neff, 1986). Vanderbilt (1992) declared that incest "is a violation of the child where he or she lives -- literally and metaphorically. A child molested by a stranger can run home for help and comfort. A victim of incest cannot" (p. 51).

Avery-Clark, O'Neil, and Laws (1981) identified two factors clearly related to child abuse — the value that culture places on children and the acceptable manner within that culture of dealing with conflict and children. Because sexual abuse is constructed according to cultural values, normative family behavior and adult/child relations (Avery-Clark et al., 1981) sexual abuse has no universal definition. Therefore questions regarding the age of the child, experiences involving peers, and criteria used to define a sexual experience as abusive (USDHHS, 2007; Wyatt & Peters, 1986) have caused confusion in defining this form of abuse. Despite differences in child-rearing practices and consensus regarding sexual abuse, most cultures disapprove sexual behavior toward children (Elliot, Tong, & Tan, 1997).

According to Haskins, Piedmont, Greer, and Eanes (2001) study on attitudes excusing sexual exploitation of children, 93% of a sample of 244 African American adults did not condone sex between an adult and child. Although child abuse is not supported, it continues to go unreported. For example, Wyatt (1990) found that over one-third of Black children who were victims of CSA did not disclose their abuse to anyone. Similarly, Hanson et al. (2003) documented that one-third of adolescents in general population did not disclose their experiences of CSA. This rate for Black adolescents in Hanson et al.'s study was approximately half of the victims. However the prevalence of incest or parental child sexual abuse is difficult to assess due to secrecy and privacy (RAINN, 2008): therefore, it is important to explore the prevalence of sexual abuse.

Prevalence of Sexual Abuse

According to the findings of Child Maltreatment 2008, a report compiled by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System which collects annual data on child abuse and neglect from child protective agencies across the United States received over 3.3 million reported cases of children being abused or neglected. Child Protective Services estimated that 772,000 (10.3 per 1,000) children were victims of child abuse and neglect (USDHHS, 2008). Approximately nine percent (69,480) of those cases being victims of sexual abuse (USDHHS, 2008). Additionally, African American children had higher rates of victimization (16.6 per 1,000 children) and rates of victimization for girls (10.8 per 1,000 children) were slightly higher than boys (9.7 per 1,000 children) (USDHHS, 2008). Approximately one out of three women and one out of seven men will be sexually victimized before 18 years of age (Finklehor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1990). Bynum et

al. (2010) studied the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) such as verbal, physical, or sexual abuse, as well as family dysfunction which include the following (1) an incarcerated, mentally ill, or substance-abusing family member; (2) domestic violence; and (3) absence of a parent because of divorce or separation. Issues with depression, substance abuse, and various health issues have been linked to adverse childhood experiences (Bynum et al., 2010). The study included 26,229 adult survey participants, both male and female, representing various age groups, educational backgrounds, and ethnicities located in Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Tennessee, and Washington (Bynum et al., 2010). The study concluded that 12.2% of the study participants (n = 26,229) experienced childhood sexual abuse. In addition, 11% (n = 2662) of African Americans surveyed in this study experienced childhood sexual abuse (Bynum, et al., 2010). A comprehensive national study of 2,030 children ages 2-17 found that the majority of sexual encounters were committed by acquaintances (Finkelhor, Ormond, Turner, & Hamby, 2005). Approximately 90% of children who were victims of sexual abuse knew their perpetrator and 68% of sexual abuse victims were molested by a member of their family (Abel & Harlow, 2002). Father-daughter and stepfather-daughter incest is most commonly reported, with most of the remaining reports consisting of mother/stepmother-daughter/son incest (RAINN, 2008).

Families in poverty are susceptible to social problems (Derezotes & Snowden, 1990) such as sexual abuse; however many studies do not include information regarding socio-economic status thus contributing to the inability to understand the contextual role of socio-economic class and the risk of sexual abuse (Kenny & McEachern, 2000). The Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4) directed by the

Department of Health and Human Services (2010) provided estimates of the incidence of child abuse and neglect in the United States. The NIS-4 report estimated higher maltreatment rates for children reared in low socioeconomic status households and children with no parent in the workforce or an unemployed parent (USDHHS, 2010). Studies on social environment and severity of abuse indicate that African American girls living in dangerous and poor communities are at an increased risk for being sexually abused (Black, Heyman, & Smith-Slep, 2001). The child's economic vulnerability is used by perpetrators to maintain silence and prevent disclosure (Kenny & McEachern, 2000). It should be noted that the likelihood of reporting the abuse as well as characteristics of CSA, circumstances around the abuse, and impacts of CSA may be dissimilar for different racial groups (Powell, 1988; Russell et al., 1988; Sanders-Phillips et al., 1995).

To illustrate these aspects, the following section will discuss the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse with African American women. It is important to note, that the investigation of factors contributing to childhood sexual abuse with African American women is not an attempt to pathologize African Americans. Exploring the ontological aspects of childhood sexual abuse with African American women warrants an understanding of the correlation between environmental aspects and the expression or interpretation of mental health. Moreover, the mental health problems caused by African Americans are often attributed to institutional racism and low socioeconomic status. The effects of institutionalized racism can increase psychological distress for African Americans (Wicker & Brodie, 2004). Additionally, individuals living in poverty encounter stress associated with financial problems, unemployment, and higher rates of

violence (Wicker & Brodie, 2004). It is important to note the stigma associated with African American men, the negative impacts of incarceration, increase in single-parent homes, cultural mistrust, and racial schemas should be considered as well (Wicker & Brodie, 2004).

African American Women

According to West et al. (2000) African American women may experience an incident with sexual abuse before the age of 8. Studies report wide variations in prevalence rates of sexual abuse ranging from 11% to 62% (Wyatt & Peters, 1986). This variation could be attributed to the differing opinions regarding the definition of childhood sexual abuse and reported cases. The estimate of childhood sexual cases involving African American women is conflictual although it is assumed to be comparable to White Americans. Wyatt (1985) examined the prevalence of child sexual abuse in a sample of African American and Caucasian women representing the population of women in Los Angeles County and found no significant difference between African American women and White women. In a study of African American college students, Priest (1992) found that 25% of the female respondents reported being sexually abused prior to the age of 17. In samples of low income African American women in San Francisco (Wingood & DiClemente, 1997) and Baltimore (Banyard, 1999) approximately 14% reported a history of childhood sexual abuse. In a community sample of African American women in Los Angeles, one-third of the surveyed residents were victims of childhood sexual abuse (Wyatt et al., 1999).

Wyatt's (1985) study indicated that African American girls are at risk for being abused in their homes by another African American male, a perpetrator from the nuclear

family or extended family. Perpetrators of white and black children may differ, for example, Pierce and Pierce (1984) found that African American children are more likely to be sexually abused by uncles and less likely by biological fathers. Research studies have revealed that African American girls are more vulnerable to severe forms of violence, such as vaginal, anal, or oral penetration (West, 2002; Wyatt et al., 1999). However, Wyatt's (1990) study found no difference in types of sexual behavior or severity in African Americans and Caucasians. Shaw et al.'s (2001) study compared the sexual abuse experiences of African American girls and Hispanic girls. Shaw et al. (2001) found that African American girls experienced more vaginal penetration. Wyatt's (1999) study found that in a sample of African American women (182) and Caucasian women (156) recruited in Los Angeles significant increases from 1984-1994 in very severe types of childhood sexual abuse for African American women, with African American women reporting childhood sexual abuse involving attempted or completed oral sex, anal sex, or rape. The previous studies regarding severity have generated conflicting results, and these conflicting findings may be attributed to the lack of consistency regarding the definition of severity.

The child's age and relationship to the perpetrator are also factors to consider with sexual abuse. Severe forms of sexual abuse involving penetration may occur if the child is older or the perpetrator is the mother's boyfriend (Huston, Prihoda, Parra, & Foulds, 1997). This is supported by Tzeng and Schwarzin's (1990) study which determined that African American children were most frequently abused by their parents' boyfriend or girlfriend. This abuse may be attributed to the shift in the marital patterns in the African American community (Abney & Priest, 1995). With this trend, African

American children are exposed to males who are not their biological father, so African American girls reared in homes without their biological father may have higher risk of child victimization than African American girls reared by both biological parents (Abney & Priest, 1995). The following section will explore the long term consequences of childhood sexual abuse.

Traumagenic Dynamics Model

To understand the long term consequences of childhood sexual abuse Finkelhor & Browne's (1985) Traumagenic Dynamics Model (TDM) is a comprehensive, process-oriented model that explores how the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral orientation of a child is disturbed by the event of sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1988). According to Finkelhor (1988) sexual abuse alters the child's view of self and view of the world, as well as disturbs or alters the child's ability to experience and express emotions. The Traumagenic Dynamics Model (TDM) is composed of four factors: traumatic sexualization, betrayal, stigmatization, and powerlessness. The traumagenic dynamic, stigmatization addresses issues with self-concept and self esteem. Since this research is focused on the self-representation, the traumagenic dynamic of stigmatization will be discussed last.

Sexualization endangers the child's sexual capacity; more specifically, this dynamic shapes the development of a child's sexuality in inappropriate and interpersonally dysfunctional ways (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985). The psychological impact of the traumatic sexualization may include confusion regarding sexual identity, sexual norms, and negative associations towards sexual activities and arousal sensation. This dynamic may manifest itself in the following characteristics: overly curious sexual

behaviors, re-enactment of abusive behavior, aggressive sexual behavior, promiscuity, prostitution, and sexual fears or addictions (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985). In the betrayal dynamic, the child realizes that a potential caregiver has caused or wished her harm, thereby hindering the child's ability to develop trust in others or build trusting relationships. In this dynamic psychological impact of betrayal may result in feelings of disregard, a lack of support or protection from parent(s), grief, depression, impaired ability to discern trustworthiness of others. Behavioral manifestations of betrayal may include clinging behavior, allowing one's children to be victimized, discomfort in intimate relationships, marital problems, aggressive behavior, delinquency, vulnerability to future abuse, social withdrawal, depression, anxiety, and various physical ailments.

The powerlessness dynamic is composed of the child's sense of ability to control his or her life and this dynamic is composed of various components. The first component addresses the child's body, space, will, wishes, and sense of efficacy which was invaded and rejected, either through force or deceitfulness (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985). The second component explores the child's anticipated future threat of being injured, harmed, or destroyed, which may have occurred in forceful types of CSA (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985). The child may experience a sense of powerlessness if the child is unable to make others believe their story (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985, 1987). The psychological impact of powerlessness may result in anxiety, low self-efficacy, perception of self as a victim, and the need to control or identify with the aggressor. Childhood sexual abuse survivors experiencing powerlessness may exhibit the following characteristics: anxiety, sleeping disorders, fears, hyper-vigilance, learned helplessness,

bullying, tolerance for abuse, employment issues, and vulnerability to subsequent victimization (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985, 1987).

Finally, the stigmatization dynamic is the accumulation of negative messages about the self that are communicated to the child victims during the abuse experience. In this dynamic the child is pressured by others or the offender for secrecy, the child internalizes attitudes of shame because of the abuse, the child is blamed by others for the abuse, and the child is labeled as “damaged goods” (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985, 1987). The psychological impact of stigmatization can include guilt, shame, and low self-esteem, which may be manifested in behaviors such as drug and alcohol abuse, isolation, criminal involvement, self-mutilation, and suicide.

Quantitative and qualitative studies have investigated the experiences of childhood sexual abuse in African American women. These studies have examined or explored the long term consequences of childhood sexual abuse which may manifest as psychological and behavioral problems, which can be categorized under each dynamic of the TDM. Thus, the following section will provide an overview of the relevant studies based on the four traumagenic dynamics of the TDM.

Sexualization. This category includes studies that suggest survivors of CSA may suffer from sexual difficulties. Wingood and DiClemente’s (1997) study of 165 Black women, 13.3% of whom reported a history of CSA, found that the abused group was more likely to have had an abortion, a history of anal sex, and being infected with a sexually transmitted disease (twice more than the non-abused group in their lifetime). Furthermore, the abused participants were more worried about acquiring HIV because of their sexual experiences. Wyatt et al. (2002) investigated a history of trauma and HIV-

related risk factors in a community sample of 457 HIV positive and HIV negative women. The participants consisted of 155 African American (108 HIV positive and 47 HIV negative), 153 European American (94 HIV positive and 59 HIV negative), and 149 Latina women (97 HIV positive and 52 negative). The study findings revealed that HIV positive women had more sexual partners, more sexually transmitted diseases, and more severe histories of abuse than HIV negative women, irrespective of race. In addition, the study found that Black women who were HIV positive were more likely to report histories of severe CSA.

Childhood sexual abuse has also been linked to later revictimization. Revictimization is explored in further detail in the powerlessness traumagenic dynamic; however, it should be noted that revictimization may lead to other behaviors often present in traumatic sexualization such as prostitution, promiscuity, and sexually transmitted diseases. For example, Miner et al. (2006) examined sexual revictimization in a sample of 230 African American women. The study findings suggested that women revictimized in adulthood have an increased probability of engaging in prostitution in comparison to women experiencing sexual abuse as a child or sexual assault as an adult. In addition, sexual revictimized women exhibited increased HIV risk, more specifically, “they were four times less likely than other women to consistently use condoms” (p. 503). Similarly, Austin, Roberts, Corliss, and Molnar’s (2008) study examined sexual violence victimization in childhood and sexual risk indicators in young adulthood in a cohort of primarily Latina and Black women. Participants identified as heterosexual or “mostly heterosexual”. The term “mostly heterosexual” was used in the study to describe young women who reported attractions to both genders, but may not describe themselves as

bisexual, lesbian, or homosexual. A comprehensive survey assessing sexual orientation, sexual risk indicators, and sexual abuse victimization was completed by 391 women between the ages of 18-24, with 47% of participants identifying as Latina, 37% Black, 15% White, and 1% was of other races or ethnicities. Using multivariable regression methods Austin et al. (2008) found that “mostly heterosexual” women were more likely to report having been the victim of childhood sexual abuse, to have had a sexually transmitted infection, to report an earlier age of first sexual intercourse, and to have had more sexual partners” (p. 1015).

Betrayal. A review of the current literature suggests that African American women survivors of CSA report manifestations of betrayal dynamics of CSA, such as increased depression and problems with relationships. For example, Rabon (1994) assessed the racial differences in both the longer-term psychological adjustment of Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA) victims and the mediating influence of perceived parental support on adjustment in a sample which consisted of 112 women (56 African American and 56 White). Rabon (1994) found that the survivors of CSA, regardless of their race, showed significant elevation on the Depression scale of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) compared to the non-abused group. However, Mennen (1995) evaluated the relationship of ethnicity to the severity of symptoms in 134 sexually abused girls 6-18 years old. Participants were evaluated on depression, anxiety, and self-worth. The sample consisted of 35 African American girls, 38 Latina girls, 51 White girls, 8 Asian American, and 2 Other. Although the author found higher levels of depression among Latina girls compared to Black and White girls, both Black and White girls showed high levels of depression with no significance

between group differences. Similarly, Sanders-Phillips et al. (1995) studied depression and locus of control in a sample of 8-13 year old Latina and African American girls who were survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The study found less depression among 8-13 year old Black girl survivors of CSA in comparison to their Latina counterparts. The authors note that cultural and social factors may influence psychological functioning, more specifically, African American girls may respond to their abuse by externalizing their symptoms through aggressive and avoidant behaviors rather than internalizing them through depressive symptoms. However, Shaw et al. (2001) did not support this assumption. Shaw et al. (2001) examined the differential effects of sexual abuse on Hispanic and African-American sexually abused girls. The sample consisted of 82 African American girls and 77 Latina girls ranging in the ages of 6 to 18 years old. They found that the Black girls were not only less likely to be perceived as depressed by their caregivers, but they also were less likely to be perceived as aggressive, delinquent, or withdrawn compared to their Latina peers. Finally, Bryant-Davis et al. (2010) explored the relationship between income and mental health effects within a sample of 413 African American women who were survivors of sexual assault. After controlling for childhood sexual abuse, there was a significant relationship between poverty and mental health outcomes such as depression.

Research has also indicated a correlation between CSA, depression, and interpersonal relationships and interpersonal violence. For example, McGuigan and Middlemiss (2005) investigated the cumulative impact of CSA and adult interpersonal violence in the past year on recent depressive symptoms among a community sample of African American women. In a sample composed of 265 women between ages 20 and 44

years, 74 % (n = 196) of the sample identified as African American. “Based on these definitions, the 265 women represented four groups: 127 (48%) women reported no history of CSA and no interpersonal violence in the past year; 79 (30%) women reported they had experienced CSA but had not experienced interpersonal violence in the past year; 31 (12%) women reported they had no history of CSA but had been a victim of interpersonal violence in the past year; and 28 (10%) women reported experiencing CSA and interpersonal violence in the past year” (p. 1276). Depressive symptoms were measured by the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) and adult interpersonal violence was measured using the Conflict Tactics Scale. The study found the participants who experienced CSA and interpersonal violence in the last year experienced the highest number of depressive symptoms in comparison to women with no history of CSA or interpersonal violence, and those reporting only CSA victimization or interpersonal violence. The model produced a variance of 42.0% supporting the study hypothesis “that cumulative victimization affects depressive symptoms in women even after controlling for the effects of age, family support, personal mastery, and stress over daily hassles” (p. 1280).

Liang et al.’s (2006) longitudinal study investigated the impact of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) on adult relational outcomes, such as marital satisfaction, in addition to the protective role of maternal support. The sample consisted of primarily low-income, African American women. Interviews and survey instruments measuring trauma, maternal attachment, marital dissatisfaction, and adult interpersonal problems was used to collect data on 136 women with histories of childhood sexual abuse. When examining maternal support, findings suggested that CSA survivors with poor maternal attachments

are more likely to enter into marital or cohabiting relationships. The study hypothesis positing a relationship between severe sexual trauma and greater marital dissatisfaction was confirmed in this study. Good maternal support during childhood may serve as a buffer between abuse and marital dissatisfaction with CSA survivors. “Specifically, CSA survivors who cited strong maternal attachment were buffered from the negative effects of trauma severity, whereas women reporting weak maternal attachment and severe abuse were relatively unprotected and experienced increased marital dissatisfaction” (Liang et al., 2006, p. 52).

Powerlessness. Existing studies report problems with anxiety, PTSD, and revictimization among African American women survivors of CSA. For example, Mennen’s (1995) evaluation of the relationship between ethnicity to the severity of symptoms in Latina, African American, and White girls found that although Latina survivors of CSA showed higher levels of anxiety compared to Black and White girls, both Black and White girls showed high levels of anxiety with no significance between group differences. Correspondingly, Leifer and Shapiro’s (1995), longitudinal study examined the effects of foster care placement versus remaining at home on the psychological functioning of 64 sexually abused African American girls 5-16 years of age. The study found that the girls continued to suffer from considerable anxiety related to sexual abuse and high levels of stress, despite some improvement in their affective responses and depression.

Owens and Chard (2003) studied the frequency of certain psychiatric disorder’s co-occurring with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Eighty-nine female adults reporting a history of CSA were recruited, with 14% of those respondents being African

American, 82% European American, 3% Hispanic, and 1% other ethnic group. The study found that 89% of the participants met criteria for PTSD. Likewise, Clear et al. (2006) investigated the relationship between ethnicity and symptom presentation; more specifically, depression, post-trauma intrusive symptoms, and post-trauma avoidance symptoms in a sample of Latina, African American, and Caucasian sexually abused girls. The study findings indicated significantly higher levels of post-trauma avoidance symptoms in African American girls in comparison to Latina girls. Finally, Bryant-Davis, et al. (2010) explored the relationship between income and mental health effects within a sample of 413 African American women who were survivors of sexual assault. After controlling for childhood sexual abuse, there was a significant relationship between poverty and mental health outcomes such as posttraumatic stress disorder.

Another long-term impact of CSA that is well documented is continuation of abusive and coercive relationships or revictimization. Duncan (2004) described revictimization of self or others as a unhealthy pattern of damaging relationships with individuals similar to the perpetrator; an inability to protect oneself from impending harm whether in relationships or surroundings; being hurtful and controlling towards others, bullying children; and abusing children verbally, emotionally, physically, and sexually. Classen et al. (2001) examined the relationship between sexual revictimization and interpersonal problems in a sample (n = 52) of treatment seeking women who self-reported as adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse diagnosed with PTSD in comparison to non-abused treatment seeking women diagnosed with PTSD (n = 58). The sample consisted of 4 African American women, 4 Latina women, 23 European American women and 4 participants identifying as other. The sample completed the

Sexual Experiences Survey to assess sexual revictimization within the past six months and the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (IIP). The study found that revictimized participants reported overall greater interpersonal problems in comparison with non-abused peers, more specifically on the subscales Hard to be Assertive and Too Responsible. The findings from the IIP suggested that revictimized participants were more socially avoidant, nonassertive, and overly nurturing.

Similarly, Classen et al. (2002) examined the relationships between trauma symptoms and two kinds of life stressors: (a) stressful life events in the previous 6 months and (b) sexual revictimization after the age of 17 in women who were survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Fifty-eight women who self-reported experiences of childhood sexual abuse involving genital contact were recruited to participate in an intervention study comparing trauma- and present-focused group psychotherapy. Within this sample 5 were African American, 8 were Hispanic/Latino, 2 were Native American, 38 were White/European American, and 5 endorsed "Other." The study found that sexual revictimization was associated with trauma-related symptoms such as anxiety, dissociation, sexual problems, and sleep disturbance.

Miner et al. (2006) explored sexual revictimization in a sample of 230 African American women. In comparison to women with no history of sexual abuse, women who experience sexual revictimization have a higher risk for emotional stress and psychological pathology. Finally, Barnes et al. (2009) examined revictimization for females who have experienced childhood sexual abuse to provide more insight into the characteristics of both physical and sexual revictimization. Barnes et al.'s (2009) 15 year longitudinal study compared the females (n = 89) self-reports of traumatic sexual and

physical abuse experiences occurring subsequent to childhood sexual abuse in contrast to sexual and physical victimizations reported by a group of non-abused comparison females (n = 90). Fifty-four percent of the sample was Caucasian, 43% African American, 2% Hispanic, and 1% Asian American with participants ranging from low to middle socioeconomic status (SES). The study found that abused females were almost twice as likely to have experienced sexual revictimization and physical revictimization as compared to non-abused peers. More specifically, sexually abused females subsequent revictimization occurred with perpetrators who were non-peers and physical revictimizations were more likely to result in injury.

Stigmatization. The current literature has shown substance abuse, suicidal ideation, and feelings of guilt and shame among Black survivors of CSA. Wingood and DiClemente (1997) studied 165 Black women, 13.3% of whom reported a history of CSA. They found that the abused group was more likely to report having a history of alcohol abuse. Jasinski et al. (2001) re-interviewed 113 Black survivors of CSA as adults and found that having experienced multiple incidents of CSA was an important predictor of adult heavy alcohol use and binge drinking even after controlling for parental drinking.

Through ethnographic inquiry Ehrim (2002) explored the crack and heroin use in African American women as a coping mechanism to address feelings of loss and physical and sexual abuse and how other factors may precede drug abuse. This sample consisted of African American women residing in an inner city transitional home for substance abuse. All 12 key participants reported experiencing incest and/or rape, with a majority of the women, 10 out of 12, or over 80%, experienced sexual abuse as children. In this sample, 9 of the 12 women (75%) were incest victims, 4 women were rape victims, and 1

woman had experienced sexual abuse by a family friend. Through data analysis the following sub themes were identified such as: “ (a) the death of loved ones, particularly mothers, while the women were young; (b) prejudice, including racism, both overt and covert, primarily within society but also within the context of their own families and kin networks; (c) rejection; (d) physical abuse from parents, siblings, male relationships, and kin; (e) incest and sexual abuse; and (f) rape” (Ehrim, 2002, pp. 783-784). Substance use was a coping agent that numbed the unresolved emotional pain of the identified themes.

Nehls and Sallmann’s (2005) phenomenological inquiry described women survivors of childhood sexual abuse experience and the concurrence with possible substance use and mental health issues. This research was part of a national collaborative study funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to identify the needs of women with histories of trauma and co-occurring alcohol/drug and mental disorders in addition to developing integrated services in response to their needs. The authors studied the three phenomena together using hermeneutic phenomenology as the methodology and in-depth interviewing as a method. The sample included 30 women ranging from the ages of 18-35, with a majority being white women. The authors identified three themes. The first theme, being thrown: this cycle of abuse highlights the women’s first incident with abuse as a child through their adolescence and through adulthood and how substance use was employed as a coping mechanism and is further described in the following excerpt.

Thus, the finding—being thrown into a cycle of abuse—is important, because it redirects attention to the self-evident but perhaps ignored context of women’s lives, a context that has both created and limited their possibilities. Further consideration of the notion of being thrown into a cycle of abuses might provide the lens through which we can see the phenomena of abuse, mental health, and substance abuse problems as a culture’s social issue and not merely as an

individual's mental health or substance abuse problem. (Nehls & Sallmann, 2005, p.372)

The second theme, living life fearfully: a restricted world describes how the abuse, substance use, and mental health problems created a world of perpetual fear for the women, a world where violence was now part of their daily existence. The third theme, helping: hearing my story emphasized the women's need to be heard and not have their experience trivialized.

Sarin and Nolen-Hoeksema (2010) studied the relationship between rumination and consumptive coping in survivors of childhood sexual abuse. According to Sarin and Nolen-Hoeksema, CSA survivors are more inclined to engage in rumination, a passive coping skill. In ruminating the survivor focuses on herself to understand and control the negative emotions resulting from the traumatic experience. In turn, ruminating may promote the use of harmful behaviors or consummatory behaviors such as substance abuse or binge eating to avoid negative thoughts of self (Sarin & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2010). The study included 730 participants from various backgrounds, with African Americans representing 5.3% (n = 32) of the study participants. The study included respondents with no childhood sexual abuse history (n = 478) and those with a history of childhood sexual abuse (n=125). The study findings suggested that women with CSA histories engaged in higher consummatory behaviors than individuals without CSA histories (Sarin & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2010). In addition, CSA survivors reported higher levels of distress, thereby responding to stress through ruminating and later engaging in harmful behaviors to avoid or cope with the negative feelings.

Research suggests increased suicidal ideation behavior among survivors of CSA. For example, Thompson et al. (2000) examined the combined roles of childhood sexual

abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in predicting nonfatal suicide attempts among 335 African American women. Thompson et al. (2000) study revealed that PTSD in combination with childhood sexual abuse increased a woman's risk for making a nonfatal suicide attempt. Also, Anderson et al.'s (2002) study examined the association between exposures to multiple forms of childhood abuse (emotional, physical, sexual) and adult suicidal behavior in a sample of low-income, African American women. The study consisted of two groups: (1) who presented to the hospital following a nonfatal suicide attempt (n = 175) and (2) women who presented to the hospital for non-emergency medical problems with no history of suicidal behavior (n=185), composing a sample of 360 participants. The study posited a greater risk of suicide attempt with women exposed to multiple incidents of abuse. In the sample of 360 participants, 46 % reported no childhood abuse, 27 % reported one type of childhood abuse, 13% reported two forms of childhood abuse, and 14% reported all three forms of childhood abuse (Thompson, 2000, p. 134). Logistic regression analyses revealed that, compared to women who did not report any experiences of childhood abuse, women who experienced one, two, or three forms of abuse were 1.83, 2.29, or 7.75 times more likely to attempt suicide, respectively (all statistically significant) (Anderson et al., 2002, p. 131). Anderson et al. (2002) found that African American women exposed to all forms of abuse (emotional, physical, and sexual) were statistically more likely to commit suicide (p. 135).

Survivors of childhood sexual abuse often experience feelings of shame which may result in feelings of never being good enough or blaming oneself for the sexual abuse. Erdmans and Black's (2008) narrative inquiry explored the relationship between

child sexual abuse and adolescent motherhood. Through narrative inquiry, the participants disclosed feelings of shame, fear, denial, internalized blame, and self-doubt. Because of the trauma, participants used drugs and alcohol to cope with pain or dissociate from the trauma. For those participants who sought or received therapy, they were able to reattribute the blame to the perpetrator or those requesting the survivors' silence.

In summary, the stigmatization of childhood sexual abuse can cause feelings of guilt and shame, suicide, substance abuse, and delinquency. Zinzow et al.'s (2010) studied the psychological adjustment in adult survivors of child sexual abuse. More specifically, the study examined the influence of abuse and parental characteristics on attributional content (Zinzow et al., 2010). The sample in this study included 183 female undergraduate students, with African American women representing 10% of the sample. According to Zinzow et al. (2010), survivors of sexual abuse blamed themselves when abused by a peer. In addition, survivors abused at a younger age used external attributions; while survivors abused at an older age self-blamed. Zinzow et al. (2010) suggested that older childhood sexual abuse survivors may self-blame since they are perceived as being less sexually naïve and possess the ability to defend themselves. In addition, Finkelhor and Browne (1985) found these characteristics connected to the survivor's self-representation, which encompasses multiple dimensions of self; therefore, the following section will provide additional insight into this area.

Self-Representation

The impact of CSA can have long term consequences on the survivor resulting in prolonged issues that may disrupt the woman's life. The preceding literature denoted the psychological impact of CSA; however, one area that deems further exploration is the

impact of CSA on the survivor's self-representation. According to Finkelhor (1988) sexual abuse altered the child's view of self and view of the world, and interfered with the survivor's ability to develop a positive sense of self (Duncan, 2004). Corbett (1996) used the term self-presentation in her study of childhood sexual abuse survivors to represent the different aspects of self, such as self-esteem, self-concept, behavioral and interpersonal aspects, as well as ethnic identity. Therefore, the term self-representation will be used in this study to examine multiple aspects of self in survivors of childhood sexual abuse, and the following studies will provide a brief overview on the literature regarding the multiple aspects of self in survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

Bruce-Moritt's (1997) quantitative study investigated the relationship between childhood sexual abuse and ethnic identity development in African American women. This comparison study examined 32 women with a history of childhood sexual abuse and 54 non-abused women to determine if experiences of CSA impacted the development and quality of ethnic identity in later adulthood. Participants completed a questionnaire which included questions regarding the experience of childhood sexual abuse along with the Black Racial Identity Attitudes Scale - short version (RIAS-B). This study did not confirm the hypotheses predicating a significant relationship between a history of childhood sexual abuse and intrusive CSA with an endorsement of Pre-Encounter attitudes or Immersion/Emersion attitudes in adulthood. However, the study did find a relationship between the victim's relationship to the perpetrator and Pre-Encounter attitudes.

Ackard and Neumark-Sztainer (2002) study examined associations between date violence and rape and dis-ordered eating behaviors and psychopathology in adolescents.

A Minnesota school-based sample of 81,247 boys and girls in 9th and 12th grades completed the 1998 Minnesota Student Survey. Most of the participants (60%) were in the 9th grade, and were White (90.3% of girls, 89.3% boys). Ackard and Neumark-Sztainer (2002) found that adolescents who had been sexually assaulted reported lower levels of self-esteem as compared to adolescents who had not experienced sexual assault.

Meeker-Jackson, (2002) study of ego-identity development used Erickson's (1968) model of psychosocial development and Marcia's (1966) four statuses of identity explored identity development in college women who were sexually abused to those who were not sexually abused as children. To study variations in identity status the EOMIS-2 was used as the research instrument in a sample of 81 participants. In this sample 20 percent or 16 participants experienced childhood sexual abuse; however, the study did not confirm the research hypotheses which posited that women who experienced childhood sexual abuse experienced difficulty in forming Achieved Identity status than individuals who were not sexually abused (Meeker-Jackson, 2002).

Neville et al., (2004) examined the CIEMSAR model among 97 (45 Black and 52 White) female student rape survivors participating in an ongoing investigation examining the rape recovery process among college students enrolled in a predominantly White Midwestern university. The CIEMSAR model depicts the direct and indirect influences of five previously identified components on post rape adjustment: rape context, personal variables, post rape responses, environmental/institutional responses, and cultural variables (Neville et al., 2004). All five components interact to influence women's acute and lasting psychological adjustment. Neville et al. (2004) found that African American female college students exposed to greater levels of sexual violence in their past were

more likely to blame themselves for their most recent sexual assault, which in turn was related to lower reported self-esteem.

In a quantitative study, Murthi et al. (2006) studied levels of self-concept between a primarily white nonclinical sample of female college students who were CSA survivors and a sample of nonabused peers in a sample. Self-concept was a multi-dimensional construct consisting of the six domains: familial, affect, competence, physical, academic, and social. The social domain examines the inability to form and sustain positive relationships, achieving intimacy with others, sexual disturbances, feelings of isolation and distrust, and revictimization. The familial domain examines problems with family functioning and the academic domain explores academic difficulties and learning problems.

The cognitive domain investigates the distortions regarding self-blame, negative attributes, helplessness, whereas the affective domain considers the effects of (CSA) on development, reaction to abuse-related stimuli, and coping skills. Finally, the physical domain studies body dissatisfaction, distortions in body image, and eating disorders. CSA survivors scored lower scores than non-abused peers in the areas of familial, affect, competence, and physical. High scores in self concept in the areas of social and academic domains were attributed to the participants possible successful integration into the university system and resilience. Most importantly, the study stressed the importance of using a multidimensional approach to assessing identity development and self concept in CSA survivors, since CSA survivors may exhibit resilience and high functioning in certain aspects of their lives, but may be struggling in other areas of their lives. Although this study utilized a primarily White, nonclinical sample of female college students, the

study provides significant insight into the effects of CSA on self-concept across the six domains examined in the study.

Mousavi's (2006) study investigated the relationship between racial identity and overall quality of life among Black women survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). Mousavi's research seeks to bridge the gap in the literature regarding Black women experiences with childhood sexual abuse and the potential protective factors that serve as buffers thereby enhancing the quality of life of CSA survivors. Racial identity was measured by the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) consisting of the following stages of identity development: Pre-Encounter (PE), Encounter (E), Immersion-Emersion (IE), Internalization (I), and Internalization-Commitment (IC). Quality of life (QOL) was measured by World Health Organization Quality of Life-Brief version (WHOQOL-BREF) over the following six domains: physical health; psychological functioning; level of independence; social relationships; environment; and spirituality, religion, and personal beliefs. In a sample size of 85 Black women survivors of CSA the study did not indicate a significant correlation between Pro-Black reference group orientation and QOL. However, the study did find that the Self-Hatred subscale of the CRIS accounted for significant variance (9%) in overall QOL. Therefore the need for exploration in the area of racial self-hatred among Black women survivors of CSA is recommended.

In a phenomenological study Corbett (1996) described the working representations of self, others, and relationships in women who have been sexually abused as children by male figures. For this study, theories of self were defined in how women processed information, such as assumptions, beliefs, attributions, behavior, and affect. Using content analysis the following themes were extracted regarding the

women's representation of self: a) low self-worth; (b) lack of knowledge of self; (c) confusion about female identity; (d) distorted body image; (e) disrupted sexuality; and (f) biased perceptions of the world. The themes regarding the women's representations of others included (a) disrupted relationships with men; (b) revictimization; (c) disrupted relationships with women; and (d) distorted and generalized representations of others.

Summary

The literature examining the impact of CSA and representation of self through a quantitative paradigm investigated a one-dimensional aspect of self, such as self-esteem (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002; Neville et al., 2004) or ethnic identity (Bruce-Moritt, 1997). Murthi et al.'s (2006) exploration of self-concept among the various domains revealed the importance of a multi-dimensional examination of self-concept; however, the sample lacked African American women. Mousavi's (2006) study of racial identity development and quality of life attempted to bridge the gap between the multiple domains of self; however, the quantitative study could not explore the self-hatred attitudes of CSA survivors.

An exploration of survivor's experiences and sense of self through a qualitative lens revealed the paucity of studies addressing this topic, more specifically with African American women. Corbett's (1996) study of survivors' representation of self, others, and relationship highlighted the importance of exploring the multiple aspects of the self. Since qualitative research does not seek to generalize, but seeks to resonate with the reader (Tracy, 2010); thereby creating transferability, Corbett's (1996) study may have resonated with more readers if an African American woman were included in the sample. Including an African American might have explored the role of culture in self-

representation, in addition to, the possible similarities and differences in themes. Thus, further research in this area is warranted. To connect this autoethnography to the larger discourse addressing representation of self, others, and relationships and child sexual abuse, this study will be theoretically grounded in the Black Feminist Thought and Relational Cultural Theory. Therefore, the following chapter will contextualize childhood sexual abuse through a sociological and psychological lens to understand African American women's experience with childhood sexual abuse.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Crotty (1998) described epistemology as “a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know” (p. 3). Questions regarding knowledge, what constitutes knowledge, and how we acquire knowledge are contingent upon the individual’s epistemological perspective.

The underlying idea of modern epistemology is that, because all knowledge is produced by the human mind, and because the mind is a more or less subjective thing, we need to understand how the mind can arrive at more or less objective knowledge of the world outside it. (Bentz & Shapiro, pp. 169-170).

Therefore, if knowledge is posited from an objectivist paradigm, knowledge or meaning of any object lies within the object, and this knowledge is waiting for human discovery (Crotty, 1998). This epistemological stance embraces the quest of human knowledge (Crotty, 1998) and the ability of the human mind to discern knowledge. Objectivist theoretical tenets employ deductive reasoning to predict, hypothesize, and make truth claims (Crotty, 1998).

However, if knowledge is understood from a constructionist epistemological lens, there are multiple truths and multiple paths to arriving at truth or knowledge (Crotty, 1998). Multiple truths and paths exist because through a constructionist lens, meanings for objects are socially constructed instead of discovered (Crotty, 1998). Hence, knowledge, truth, and meaning regarding an object are contingent upon our interaction with that object (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, constructionist theoretical frameworks employ inductive reasoning moving from specific observations to plausible theories that

seek to understand, describe, empower, and emancipate individuals placed within a social context. Feminist theories complement the constructionist theoretical framework since these theories address women's meaning and understanding of knowledge. For example, the feminist theory, Black Feminist thought specifically addresses social constructs of Black women, the importance of self-definition, and the concept of intersectionality.

From a sociological lens, a macro-theoretical framework identifies continuous and influential patterns that describe society (Bankston, 2000). The theoretical application of the macro-level perspective is associated with functional theory; a sociological theory that addresses the interaction between large-scale social structures and relationships (Bankston, 2000). "Functionalists attempt to explain why certain conditions exist in society by trying to ascertain their purpose-their function" (Bankston, 2000, p. 193). If Black Feminist thought is examined through the functionalist lens for the purpose of explaining certain societal conditions, issues regarding oppression and socially constructed images emerge. Therefore, as a macro-theory Black Feminist thought examines the social constructs such as intersectionality, oppression, and socially constructed images of African American women. Moreover, Black Feminist thought explores how these social constructs shape African American women's relationship with self and others. The following section will provide an overview regarding Black Feminist thought as a compendium constructed by African American women often subjugated in dominant discourse and subsumed within hegemonic epistemological concerns.

Black Feminist Epistemology

Collins (1990) defined epistemology as "the study of philosophical problems in concepts of knowledge and truth" (p. 202). Hence, to understand Black Feminist Thought

as an epistemological or theoretical framework, it is important to understand how African American women construct not discover knowledge. The underlying foundation of Black Feminist Thought is grounded in theoretical ideologies developed by African American women articulating the experience of the African American woman (Collins, 2000). These theories lend insight into the dominant discourse, more specifically, “the beliefs, norms and values that are taken for granted in everyday interaction” (Crotty, 1998, p. 144) which then provides space for analysis and critique by African American women. This analysis and critique is employed by Black women intellectuals using their own experiences to express the Black woman’s standpoint; thereby, adding to the growing body of knowledge regarding African American women.

The mere idea of knowledge being constructed in a social context, rather than through objective “reason” is a polar opposite to the traditional views regarding knowledge often grounded in Objectivist epistemology. As noted previously, traditional forms of knowledge reflecting tenets of Objectivism seek absolutes or relative truths (Crotty, 1998); which are deemed credible by a Eurocentric masculine knowledge validation process (Collins, 2000). As a result, most traditional works are grounded in Objectivist, therefore, Post Postivist understandings of knowledge construction and ways of “knowing.”

Black Feminist thought detours from the traditional understandings of knowledge construction by seeking to understand the meaning of an experience instead of producing generalizations or truth claims. Thus the African American women must broach the topic of knowledge by challenging and re-deploying knowledge construction to include multiple ways of knowing thereby questioning “what constitutes adequate justifications

that a given knowledge claim, such as a fact or theory, is true” (Collins, 1990, p. 202).

This is a consideration for African American women since the African American woman’s experience with work, family, motherhood, and sexuality is often either distorted in traditional academic discourse or totally excluded (Collins, 2000).

As a result, Black Feminist Epistemology is not congruent with traditional forms of knowledge validation; consequently, the experiences of Black women become a subjugated knowledge (Collins, 2000). Because the objectivist perspective is deemed as the exemplar for discovering knowledge (Collins, 2000), methodologies and methods for acquiring knowledge are grounded in Positivist and Post-Positivist theories (Collins, 2000; Crotty, 1998). These Positivist methodologies attempt to produce objective generalizations with researchers acting as detached observers creating an absence of emotion during the research process (Collins, 1990). Thus, requiring African American women to “objectify ourselves, devalue our emotional life, and displace our motivations for furthering knowledge about Black women” (Collins, 1990, p. 205). This process forces African American women to continuously refute truth claims that support distorted images of African American women prominent in dominant discourse. In summary, Black Feminist Thought constructs a space where African American women’s way of knowing is esteemed and valued (Okeke, 2000). The development of this epistemology began during the days of slavery and is continuously evolving. Therefore, the historical progression of this epistemology warrants further exploration.

The Beginning. Black Feminist Thought was marked by two distinct periods. The first movement surfaced during Abolition and concluded with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment (Marbley, 2005; Taylor, 1998). This movement addressed

experiences of Black women, tactics to dismantle slavery, and the resistance of racially gendered sexual abuse (Taylor, 1998). Black Feminist Thought explored the Jezebel/Mammy dichotomy, specifically, the relationship between the stereotypical images surrounding Black womanhood and sexual abuse, as well, as the growing trend of Black women being blamed for their own victimization (Taylor, 1998). During this period Sojourner Truth's "Ar'nt I a Woman" exposed the intersection of race and gender (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981). Sojourner Truth's speech also troubled the deconstruction of the word "intellectual" (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981). A Black woman is an intellectual because of the wisdom she imparts about her experience, regardless of any educational attainment or recognition given by a social institution.

The second wave of Black Feminist thought was marked by activism and involvement in two movements: Women's Liberation and Black Revolution (Taylor, 1998). Betty Freidan's (1963) *The Feminine Mystique* was acclaimed as the riveting text that brought attention to the lives of unhappy married, middle-class women; as well as, lighting the spark for the second wave of the feminist movement or women's liberation movement. Although the Women's Liberation challenged women's place in society, social activist, Shirley Chisholm challenged the different conditions of Black and White women (Taylor, 1998). Freidan (1963) is commended for giving voice to a group of marginalized women; however, bell hooks (1984) challenged the transferability of her work because it doesn't speak to the silent majority. The silent majority, as bell hooks (1984) described are those "who are victimized by sexist oppression, women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually—women who are powerless to change their condition in life" (p. 1). In referencing the plight and condition of the silent

majority, African American women began to diverge from the mainstream movement (Marbley, 2005). Issues affecting Black women such as childcare, employment, lesbianism, sexuality, welfare, media image, addiction, incarceration, and Black women's relationship with one another became the premise behind the evolving revolutionary movement (Marbley, 2005; Taylor, 1998). In addition, the Black Panther Party played a significant role in exposing institutionalized racism and the importance of activism (Taylor, 1998).

The 1980s marked a shift in Black Feminist thought in regards to literary works produced by Alice Walker, Audre Lord, bell hooks, and Toni Morrison. This shift compelled bell hooks to highlight the importance of creating a theoretical framework that would evaluate, challenge, and change structures of domination (Taylor, 1998). bell hooks (1984) emphasized the importance of integrating personal experience with scholarly work. Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 2000) took this approach in her text, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* which combined literary, musical, and scholarly text to examine the experiences of African American women through a sociological lens.

Core Tenets. Collins (2000) indicated that “Black Feminist thought aims to empower African-American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions” (p.22). The concept of intersectionality stems from a theoretical view that conceptualizes identity as multi-layers existing simultaneously within systems of oppression and privilege (Dill, McLaughlin, & Nieves, 2007; Jones, 2009). Intersectionality exposes social inequalities by exploring the connections between

identity categories and individual differences situated in social discourse (Dill, McLaughlin, & Nieves, 2007; Jones, 2009).

Therefore, an examination of African American women reveals intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality. This intersection helps to support stereotypical images of the African American woman as a mammy, matriarch, welfare mother, and hot momma; therefore, manipulating ideas about Black womanhood (Collins, 2000). Most importantly, these images normalize racism, sexism, and poverty (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981). Although black women, as a collective group, experience intersecting oppressions, the second tenet addressed the importance of noting that Black women have different responses to these experiences (Collins, 2000; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). A third distinguishing feature of Black Feminist thought, noted by Collins (2000) “concerns the connections between U.S. Black women’s experiences as a heterogeneous collectivity and any ensuing group knowledge or standpoint” (p.29). This feature supports the fourth tenet that recognizes the contributions of African American women intellectuals. Intellectuals respected by the scholarly elite and intellectuals that impart wisdom for living (Collins, 2000). The final tenet of this theory rests upon activism and the importance of social justice (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981).

Slavery: The Beginnings of Sexual Exploitation

Providing a comprehensive understanding of the history, culture, and lived experiences of Black women since the inception of slavery contextualizes the role of sexual violence in the lives of African American women. To understand the role of sexual violence and abuse in the lives of African American women, there is a need for an understanding of the history, culture, and lived experience of Black women living in the

United States, starting from the inception of slavery. In a historical examination of the African American woman's sexuality, hooks (1981) stated African American women's first sexual role was a reproducer of slaves. Slavery, in the United States thrived in a hegemonic culture where the African woman's sexuality was associated with reproduction that ultimately profited the slave owners (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1981; West, 2006.). Harriet Jacobs (2001) stated in her narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, that "*Slavery is terrible for men; but it far more terrible for women*" (pg. 66). The role as a breeder and worker was already defined (bell hooks, 1981) before African women left the shores of Africa. African American women were growing accustomed to sexual violence before reaching Jamestown Virginia, in 1619 (West, 2006).

Depicted as a breeder with animalistic desires, once the African woman hit the land of the free, she was introduced to the auction block. A block where she was stripped naked, examined to determine reproductive capabilities, and torn from her family (Collins, 1990; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1981). Once they became the property of a slaveholder and stripped of all rights, enslaved women were seduced, coerced, and when needed, violently forced to engage in sexual relations with slaveholders and overseers (Sommerville, 2005; West, 2006). African American women's sexuality was constructed within a system of enslavement, thereby sexuality was controlled to produce more workers and manage fertility (Collins, 1990, hooks, 1981). Because the importation of African slaves was banned in 1808, the sexual exploitation of African American women to produce a continuous labor force to maintain the current slavery based economy was very important (West, 2006). Hence, the implementation of slave breeding, a practice

which paired healthy slaves to produce offspring suitable for labor was necessary to maintain the economy (West, 2006).

Although African American women were considered chattel and their bodies were commodities, African American women were also depicted as overtly sexual, amoral animals (Davis, 1981). Labels such as passionate, carnal, lustful were often used to incite shame (Collins, 1990, 2000, hooks, 1981). The dominant group's need to dehumanize and devalue African American women by depicting them as oversexed, rebellious animals was a tactic used to justify the need for the current capitalist class system and slavery based economy which solely profited members of the dominant group (Collins, 1990, 2000). According to historical records (Hine, 1989), 58% of all enslaved women between the ages of 15 and 30 were sexually assaulted by white men; therefore, African American women who were no longer exploitable for profit due to infertility or reduced work activity experienced some reprieve (Collins, 1990, 2000; hooks, 1981).

Even with this reprieve, the distorted views regarding the African American woman's sexuality transformed the older African American women into asexual beings (Davis, 1981). The years following the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation depict a nation transitioning from a primarily agricultural economy to an industrial based economy (Collins, 1990). The sexual exploitation of the African American woman was no longer necessary; however, the African American woman's role and image in society would still be controlled by her sexuality (Collins, 1990, 2000). The following section will explore the various socially constructed images of the African American woman in society and how these roles are tied to the oppression of the African American woman and her sexuality.

Controlling Images

The intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality not only normalizes the oppression of African American women, this intersectionality sustains the stereotypical images of the African American woman as a mammy, matriarch, welfare mother, and hot momma (Collins, 2000). It is important to note the power of stereotypical images because as Hazel Carby (1987) stated the role of stereotypes is “not to reflect or represent a reality but to function as a disguise, or mystification, of objective social relations” (p.22).

Because these images mask the true nature and essence of the African American woman, this devaluation creates a binary where the African American woman becomes the Other (Collins, 1990; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005) and “ an object to be manipulated and controlled by others” (Collins, 1990, p. 69). Because African American women have been viewed as undomesticated, animalistic, and less human since the inception of slavery, she is automatically viewed as inferior to those who are domesticated, cultured, and human (Collins, 1990, 2000). More specifically, Collins (2000) addressed that as the Other, African American women are forced to negotiate self-defined images as an African American woman. Harris (1982) provided insight into the powerlessness African American women experience in the quest of self-identity.

Called Matriarch, Emasculator and Hot Momma. Sometimes Sister, Pretty Baby, Auntie, Mammy and Girl. Called Unwed Mother, Welfare Recipient and Inner City Consumer. The Black American Woman has had to admit that while nobody knew the troubles she saw, everybody, his brother and his dog, felt qualified to explain her, even to herself. (p. 4)

The objectification as the Other is necessary in society because it denies the African American woman subjectivity and continues to sustain “the political economy of domination that characterized slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism” (Collins, 2000,

p. 71). The loss of African American women's subjectivity also denied African American women the right to "define their own reality, establish their own identities, name their history" (hooks, 1989, p. 42). Objectification has resulted in the African American woman being viewed as animals, deferred to as "girl" denoting her position as a child and incompetent, and eventually feeling invisible (Collins, 2000). It is through this objectification that stereotypical images of African American women are naturalized. The first stereotypical image formed to control the African American woman's identity was the mammy.

Mammy. Because the inception of slavery, the first image ascribed to the African American woman was the mammy (Collins, 1990, 2000; Wallace-Sanders, 2009). The mammy image is the archetype of the ideal African American woman constructed by the dominant group (Collins, 1990, 2000), as well as, the premise from which the behavior of African American women is evaluated. This image, originating from the faithful and obedient house slave (Bryant, et al, 2005; Collins, 1990) loved and nurtured her slaveholder's children more than her own (Collins, 1990, 2000). The mammy possessed some level of authority within her slaveholder's family; however, she was aware of her position as the subordinate (Collins, 1990).

Viewing the mammy's subordination through the lens of intersectionality magnifies the importance of subordination (Wallace-Sanders, 2009). Subordination taught African American women to teach this behavior to her biological children and supported the racial superiority of the White employers, thereby encouraging white woman to identify with the racial and class privilege afforded to her husbands and sons (Collins, 2000; Wallace-Sanders, 2009; Williams, 1995). Similarly, the mammy

archetype defined the African American woman's role as a woman and how she would express her sexuality. The African American woman was epitomized as animalistic, sexual, and rebellious, whereas, the mammy image was the polar opposite (Christian, 1985; Collins, 2000). Therefore, physical images of the mammy present an asexual woman, who is harmless, totally committed to her White family, which in turn eased the fears of the dominant group (Bryant et al., 2005; Christian, 1985; Collins, 2000).

The economic exploitation of the African American woman continued after slavery as African American women shifted into the low-paying jobs in private homes to low-paying jobs in the service industry (Collins, 2000). As African American women progressed into the corporate world, the mammy image was still present (Collins, 2000). Omolade's (1994) portrayal of "mammification" lends insight into how the African American woman in the professional world is still evaluated accorded to the mammy archetype (Collins, 2000). Dumas (1980) explored the experiences of African American women serving as leaders. Even in leadership positions, these women were still expected to possess characteristics associated with the mammy image, such as asexual, faithful, and obedient (Dumas, 1980) or risk being penalized. Instead of being committed to the White family, African American women are now expected to be completely committed to their job (Collins, 2000). African American women unwilling to conform to the faithful and obedient subordinate or good mother were characterized as another stereotypical image, the Matriarch.

Matriarch. The controlling image of the Matriarch emerged during the women's movement critique of U.S. patriarchy (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981; Gilkes, 1983; Marbley, 2005; Sidel, 2000). Through the process of racialization, which entails

“attaching racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group” (p. 75), the matriarch became the scapegoat for poverty and the increasing number of single mother households in the African American community (Collins, 2000; Marbley, 2005; Sidel, 2000). When compared to the mammy archetype representing the “good” African American woman, the matriarch was portrayed as the “bad” African American mother. Moynihan’s (1965) governmental report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* was the catalyst in publicly portraying the African American woman as an unfit mother and wife. Because she was unfeminine and overly aggressive, she emasculated the male partner causing him to desert his family (Collins, 2000; Moynihan, 1965). Because she was a working mother, and unable to properly supervise her children she was the primary factor contributing to her child’s poor academic achievement (Collins, 2000; Moynihan, 1965).

Examining the matriarch image through the lens of intersectionality during this time in history, provides the context and validation for African American social class outcomes (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981; Marbley, 2005; Sidel, 2000; Wallace-Sanders, 2009). From a sociological landscape, poverty is viewed as an intergenerational concept (Payne, 2005) that continues based on values regarding education and work (Collins, 2000). African American women characterized as a matriarch were viewed as unloving towards their children, thereby contributing to the child’s poor academic achievement (Collins, 2000). By viewing the African American woman through this lens, the dominant society could blame the African American woman for African American children’s lack of academic achievement, delinquency, the plight of the African American community, and the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Collins, 2000;

Davis, 1981; Marbley, 2005). These images were used not only to blame the African American woman for the economic depravity, but to justify the extreme distributions of wealth (Collins, 2000). Again, as the Other, African American women were forced to negotiate internally constructed views of self with the Matriarch image. This negotiation resulted in African American women blaming themselves for being single or for their son's criminal involvement (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1997), leading to the regulation of African American women's behavior by other African Americans and society. The Matriarch image was also used to influence White women's gender identity (Collins, 2000) by inciting the possible consequences of challenging the White patriarchy, more specifically, "aggressive, assertive women are penalized—they are abandoned by their men, end up impoverished, and are stigmatized as being unfeminine" (p. 77).

Welfare mother. Although opposing images, the mammy and matriarch images are used to economically exploit African American women and shape the African American woman's sexuality, and the welfare mother image was no different. Like the Matriarch, this image was tied to African American social class outcomes (Sidel, 2000). For this reason, the welfare mother image was connected to the increasing number of working-class African American women receiving welfare benefits (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981; Sidel, 2000) and emerged when African American women demanded equity in access to state services. As stated previously, during slavery the economy thrived off the sexual exploitation of the African American woman as a breeder to produce offspring to supporting the slave economy (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981). However, when African American women demanded access to services routinely given to other Americans, and refused to accept cheap labor jobs once held by parents and grandparents, the need to

control the African American woman's fertility became a salient issue (Collins, 2000; Sidel, 2000) since the African American woman's resistance was viewed as a potential threat to the economy.

The African American woman's refusal to accept meager wages also resulted in her demonization. The welfare mother and the matriarch are similar in that both groups represent bad mothers; yet, the welfare mother's passivity is viewed as laziness (Collins, 2000; Sidel, 2000) because she is content in collecting government assistance. This lazy characterization and passivity represents another justification for multiple oppressions of race, gender, and class (Collins, 2000). Not only is the welfare mother poor, she is an unwed mother ostracized for not instilling within her child a work ethic, and blamed for her own poverty (Collins, 2000).

Welfare Queen. During the Regan administration the welfare mother image progressed into the welfare queen. The welfare queen is the highly materialistic, domineering, working class woman living off public assistance (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981). As noted earlier with the Matriarch, who was blamed for the African American community's impoverished conditions, the Welfare Queen is scapegoated as a threat to U.S. interests. Because, she is propagated in public discourse as the cause of America's social issues (Collins, 2000, Lubiano, 1992; Sidel, 2000) to disguise the impending effects of cuts in government spending on social service programs.

Black lady. According to Lubiano (1992) African American women who embodied middle-class values were portrayed as the "Black Lady" (Collins, 2000, p. 80) because they were educated, hard-working, and achievement-oriented. At first glance, this image portrays the African American woman in a positive light. Yet, the Black lady

image is a composite of other controlling images (Bryant et al., 2005; Collins, 2000). For example, the Black lady is similar to the mammy because she is expected to work twice as hard as others (Bryant et al., 2005). With a time-consuming job, achievement-oriented nature mistaken as aggression she is characterized as unfeminine, and too assertive. Like the matriarch she has little time for a male partner or is emasculating towards her male partner (Collins, 2000).

Similar to the welfare mother and welfare queen, the Black lady is viewed as a threat to the political economy. With the passage of major Civil Rights initiatives, such as Affirmative Action, the Black lady is contending for opportunities typically afforded to White men (Collins, 2000). Despite her educational advancement and experience her competence is questioned. Once again, this positionality forces the African American woman to negotiate internally self-defined images with the controlled images communicated in discourse sending the resounding message that “whether by virtue of not achieving and thus passing on bad culture as welfare mothers, or by virtue of managing to achieve middle-class success . . . black women are responsible for the disadvantaged status of African Americans” (Lubiano, 1992, p. 335). Hence, the social class images of the welfare mother, welfare queen, and Black Lady images are interconnected with matriarchy ideology designed to discredit the African American woman. In addition, these images justify the continuing intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality; and the oppression of the African American woman’s sexuality continues with the last controlling image: the jezebel.

Jezebel. The final controlling image, the jezebel, whore, or hoochie, is a representation of deviant Black female sexuality (Collins, 2000; Taylor, 1998) which

emerged during slavery. This archetype grounded in deviant sexuality, dramatizes African American women as sexually aggressive and served as the rationale for the prevalence in sexual assaults by White men during slavery (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981; West, 2006). Consequently, increased fertility would be an expected outcome from sexually aggressive African American women (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981). Presenting African American women as sexually aggressive, rebellious, and animalistic led to the stigmatization of the African American woman (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981; Taylor, 1998) because she was the blame for her victimization. The jezebel or hoochie construct portrays the African American woman displaying inappropriate sexual behavior which then becomes characterized as a “freak” (Collins, 2000). Moreover, Jezebel is viewed as a “freak” or “freaky” and her sexual appetite is masculinized because she desires sex like a man (Collins, 2000) when compared to African American men’s hypermasculinity.

In summary, the controlling images are interconnected in that each image is used to define the African American woman’s sexuality. The jezebel’s sexuality crosses the boundaries of sexuality by challenging the normal/deviant binary for sex (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981). Whereas the mammy asexuality marks the appropriate boundaries for African American women to express their sexuality (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981) as this image presents African American women as overweight, dark, with prominent African features and not a desirable partner for White men. The mammy’s lack of sexuality gives her the freedom to surrogate children not born from her own womb (Collins, 2000), and represents the Euromasculine thought of the division between sexuality and motherhood. Conversely, the welfare mother, welfare queen, and matriarch are negative images of sexuality because their sexuality is linked to their fertility (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981).

The Black lady is hard-working and respected and “she is told that she can reproduce, but no one except her is especially disturbed if she does not” (p. 84). In short, these controlling images have economically exploited and sexually exploited the African American woman and controlled the African American woman’s sexuality. These erroneous depictions disseminated in discourse have shaped views on sexual violence against African American. Recognizing the relevance of cultural ideology in the construction of African American women’s self-representation, a mid-level lens of Relational Cultural theory will examine how self-representation is constructed through connection to other beings.

Relational Cultural Theory

Through the 1930s-1950s, psychoanalysis played a significant role in therapy (Sharff, 2008). Freud’s theory regarding human development and structure of personality development provided the basic framework for psychoanalysis. Object relations, ego psychology, and self-psychology are theories based in psychoanalysis as well. During this time in history, much of the psychological theories derived from the Western culture, and the standard for the human development model was the white, middle class, heterosexual male seeking individuality and independence (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991). Freud and other psychoanalytic theorists received criticism regarding the psychological development of women. Noted feminist therapist, Karen Horney disputed Freud’s beliefs regarding penis envy and oedipal development. Other therapists questioned the misdiagnosis of women because of gender-role stereotypes, inappropriate relationships between female patients and male therapists, and lack of attention to women’s individuality (Sharff, 2008, p. 437). These questions roused

feminist therapists such as, Jean Baker Miller to integrate specific elements of psychoanalysis with feminist theory. One of the theories developed from her extensive examination is the Stone Center Relational Cultural Theory Model.

Traditional psychological development models emphasize “individuation, separation, and autonomy as markers for emotional maturity and psychological health” (Comstock et al., 2008, p. 1). Kashima, Kashima, and Aldridge (2001) described two aspects of the self-concept, individualist and relational. The individualist is concerned with self and exhibits goal-directed behavior (Kashima et al., 2001). However, the relational self is concerned with maintaining relationships with significant others (Kashima et al., 2001). Dr. Miller theorized that women have a relational self-concept and suggested, “That for women the primary motivation throughout life is toward establishing a basic sense of connection to others” (Covington & Surrey, 1997, p. 335). Dr. Miller used her findings to write her first book, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Miller, 1976).

In 1981, Dr. Miller became the director of the Stone Center of Wellesley College. At the Stone Center, Jean Baker Miller along with Judith Jordan, Irene Stiver, and Janet Surrey initiated a series of discussions exploring the complexities of women; thereby, giving birth to the fundamental concepts of Relational Cultural Theory (Comstock et al., 2008). This relational model characterized relationships as conduits that fostered growth and development. In addition, Covington and Surrey (1997) emphasized the importance of healthy connections with individuals that were empowering and mutual, which are essential components for women’s psychological development.

RCT Psychological Development

Relational Cultural Theory applies Erickson's (1968) psychosocial stages as a model for women's psychological development. According to Erickson, (1968) infants developed trust during the infancy stage. In addition, RCT (Jordan et al., 1991) discovered that infants also learned to imitate and act like the main caretaker, which aided in the infant's ability to be in a relationship (Jordan et al., 1991). RCT (Jordan et al., 1991) theorized that the infant detected the feelings of the other individual, and possessed the ability to identify their own feelings as well (Jordan et al., 1991). During the early childhood stage, Erickson (1968) theorized that the child experienced autonomy or shame and doubt (Sharff, 2008). During this stage, parents promote independence and confidence in the child. Instead of encouraging autonomy, RCT assumes the child has increased abilities, access to more physical and mental resources, and the relationships with the main people continue to evolve without separating (Jordan et al., 1991).

In Erickson's (1968) phallic stage, children are encouraged to take initiative and develop competencies. As opposed to RCT (Jordan et al., 1991) which noted that during this stage young girls may be encouraged to focus their energies on the "well-being, growth, and development of men" (p. 18). As the child progresses through Erickson's (1968) latency stage, they learn skills necessary for school and the sex-role identity. RCT (Jordan et al., 1991) induced that girls were not latent during this period, but became deeply involved in relationships, notably with other girls. Interestingly, girls learn to hide the multiple aspects of self, in particular their sexuality (Jordan et al., 1991). Whereas, in comparison to girls, young boys are learning new skills- such as the rules for the game of life- and competition (Jordan et al., 1991).

During the adolescence stage, adolescents develop confidence that others see them as they see themselves (Sharff, 2008). RCT (Jordan et al., 1991) viewed adolescence as a stage where boys were opening up, while young girls are closing down. Through socialization, girls realize that they cannot actively express every aspect of themselves, especially with sexuality, since girls are conditioned to believe their perceptions regarding sex are shameful and wrong (Jordan et al., 1991). Girls are now forced to negotiate their multiple selves, including the sexual one, in a fashion that will fulfill the desire to be a “being-in-relationship” (Jordan et al., 1991, p. 21). This negotiation is normalized by girls’ willingness to adapt characteristics such as, passivity, submission, and commitment to doing for others as the solution to this conflict. Conversely, boys are developing their multiple selves independent of others, and learning that women will adapt to them (Jordan et al., 1991).

Foundation Components

Originally known as self-in-relation theory, relational theory, and the Stone Center model is now known as Relational Cultural Theory. The theoretical approach to RCT is one based on the premise that we are social beings learning from our relationships throughout our life, (Comstock et al., 2008) and our sense of self, emotional health and physical health require connection to other people. This theoretical perspective espouses that a woman’s sense of self develops in her relationships with others and taking care of those relationships. Separation does not foster a woman’s growth, and relationships are mutually enhancing (Jordan et al., 1991). Relational Cultural Theory (Jordan et al., 1991) defined relationships as a process of learning about oneself and learning about others

through mutual interaction and continuous emotional-cognitive dialogue. In RCT, the self gains vitality in relationship and is not threatened or reduced by connections (Jordan, et al, 1991).

Jordan and Miller (2002) theorized core tenets for Relational Cultural Theory. First, a person grows through and toward relationship throughout the life span and movement toward mutuality rather than separation characterizes mature functioning (Jordan, 2010). The ability to participate in increasingly complex and diversified relational networks characterizes psychological growth, and mutual empathy and mutual empowerment are at the core of growth-fostering relationships (Jordan & Miller, 2002). Authenticity is the ability to represent all aspects of oneself in a relationship (Miller, 1976). After a mutual connection is established, authenticity provides a sense of “knowing,” of “seeing” an individual (Covington & Surrey, 1997). Authenticity is necessary for real engagement in growth-fostering relationships, and individual growth occurs because of their contribution and participation in the relationship (Jordan, 2010). Achieving authenticity brings an increased relational competence over the life span (Jordan 2002, 2010).

Connection. Connection in relationships is an important concept to examine in women’s psychological development. Miller (1976) theorized that women stay with, build on, and develop according to their connections to others, as well as, build their self-concept around being able to make and maintain connections. However when this connection is ruptured there is a loss of relationship, and possibly a loss of total self (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1976). Women and men begin life attached to others. Yet, men are encouraged to develop their personality, talents, and skills. Therefore, men transition to a

state of learning that they are in control of their fate, so, the value of affiliations and connections diminish. Like men, women develop and change. Yet, women remain in a state of believing their fate is in the hands of another individual. Hence, as women continue to grow, women transfer this connection to a male figure (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1976).). This transfer occurs because dominant discourse reiterates the faulty belief that “women cannot depend on their own individual development, achievement, or power because if they try, they are doomed to failure” (Miller, 1976, p.87). It is important to note, that women’s desire for connection is not a weakness because it is essential for social advancement (Miller, 1976). Yet this desire for connection is the source of many of women’s problems.

When women move away from this harmful psychological belief, they learn to build healthy connections. Miller (1976) defined this connection as an experience in a relationship characterized by mutual empathy and mutual empowerment. Mutuality occurs when each person can represent her feelings, thoughts, and perceptions in the relationship and can move with and be moved by the feelings, thoughts, and perceptions of the other individual (Covington & Surrey, 1997; Jordan, 2010). Mutual empathy is the ability to join with another at a cognitive or affective level and mutual empowerment occurs when each person grows in psychological strength and power (Covington & Surrey, 1997; Jordan, 2010). This mutuality brings about a relational attitude, orientation, or stance, and occurs when an individual is engaging with the whole person (Covington & Surrey, 1997; Jordan, 2010). This relational stance allows the individuals in the relationship to represent her feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and be moved with and moved by the feelings of the other (Covington & Surrey, 1997; Jordan, 2010).

As a result, the individuals in the relationship are emotionally available, accessible, and vulnerable. Miller (1986) stated mutual empowerment promoted the following five features: 1.) Zest: Each person feels a greater sense of zest (vitality, energy); 2.) Action: Each person feels more able to act and does act in the world; 3.) Knowledge: Each person has a more accurate picture of her/himself and the other person(s); 4.) A sense of worth: Each person feels a greater sense of worth; and 5.) Desire: Each person feels more connected to other persons and exhibits a greater motivation to connect with other people beyond those in one's primary relationships (p. 2).

Disconnection. The disruption of a relationship can have a detrimental effect on women's self-concept. Miller (1976) theorized that women's faulty development regarding connection sets the groundwork for many pathological problems.

Disconnection is defined as the experience of a ruptured relationship, (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1976.) and this disconnect may occur for two reasons. The individuals in the relationship are unable to understand each other (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1976; Sharf, 2008) The second cause for disconnect occurs when the more powerful person does not show empathy to the less powerful person. When the injured or less powerful person is unable to represent herself or her feelings in a relationship, receives a response of indifference, or denial of experience she will begin to withhold aspects of herself out of the relationship in order to maintain the relationship (Jordan, 2010; Jordan & Miller, 2002). Miller and Stiver (1995) defined relational images as words, terms, or actions, which denoted a person's expectations and fears of how others will respond to them. These relational images are the individual's expected outcomes for seeking to establish meaningful connections with others (Miller & Stiver, 1995). If an individual is denied

empathic opportunities, the individual's views of relationships may become distrustful and negative (Miller & Stiver, 1995). These contradictions are further enforced when we seek connection, which in return produces vulnerability (Comstock, et al., 2008,). Therefore, the individual develops defense mechanisms to protect oneself, yet maintain a connection to the relationship. This defense mechanism is known as the central relational paradox. The central relational paradox consists of strategies of disconnection an individual utilizes in order to fit into relationships available, while risking authenticity (Jordan, 2010; Jordan & Miller, 2002). Individuals use these strategies to avoid hurt, rejection, social exclusion, marginalization, and other forms of disconnection (Comstock, et al., 2008, p. 1).

Once a relationship enters disconnection, individuals will begin to experience a decreased sense of vitality because of feeling less connected and more alone in a difficult experience (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1986). Inability to take action in a relationship is accompanied by a sense that taking action out of one's feelings will lead to destructive or bad consequences. As the disconnection progresses more confusion in the relationship with lessened knowledge of others and oneself increases, leading to a diminished self-worth (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1986). This diminished self-worth is a result of shame. A woman experiencing shame engages in blame attribution because she believes she is responsible for the relationship, creating the connection, and maintaining the connection (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1986). Since she failed in this capacity, she begins to alter herself in an effort to reconnect to the relationship (Comstock, et al., 2008). If the aggressor feels threatened, shame will be used as a manipulative tool to maintain their power.

Shame is a powerful tool for control because it isolates and silences the individual being shamed (Comstock et.al., 2008). Eventually, the individual in disconnect turns away from others and enters condemned isolation (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1986). Condemned isolation is a result of frequent disconnections causing an individual to feel void of the possibility of human connection (Comstock et.al., 2008; Jordan, 2010). Once an individual enters condemned isolation, this person usually experiences shame and questions their value as a human being. Persons belonging to traditional marginalized groups are sometimes devalued and their merit often comes into question. Therefore, these individuals will blame themselves for the disconnection in the relationship and the failures in their life. The pain of isolation can become very painful, so the individual learns to hide parts of their life. Eventually the individual begins to relate to others in an inauthentic matter; thereby, reconnecting to non-mutual relationships (Comstock et.al., 2008; Jordan, 2010).

Summary

Through Relational Cultural Theory the multiple aspects of self are examined, as it details the importance of connection with others and relationships. Relationships that form healthy connections have the power to heal, whereas, relationships in disconnect may reiterate previous pain. The implications of disconnect can result in isolation, guilt, shame, and depression. By employing Black Feminist Thought the interaction between large scale social structures and African American women reveal stereotypical images surrounding the African American woman's sexuality. This underpinning supports the African American woman being blamed for her own victimization, and contextualizes ideologies constructing the African American woman's representation of self, others, and

relationships. In summary, this feminist theoretical framework connects this research to the larger discourse addressing the African American woman's representation of self, others, and relationships.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Background of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore my experience with childhood sexual abuse and self-representation. Previous studies investigating African American experiences with childhood sexual abuse have explored the long term consequences of this trauma which may manifest as psychological and behavioral problems. Finkelhor and Browne (1985) found that psychological trauma and behavioral manifestations were connected to the survivor's self-representation, which encompasses self-concept, self-esteem, and identity development.

From the researcher's extensive literature review, previous studies examining African American women's self-representation and sexual abuse have only examined ethnic identity (Mousavi, 2006). Other studies have found that sexual abuse survivors experience issues with self-concept and self-esteem; (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002; Murthi et al., 2006; Neville et al., 2004) however; these studies have not included African American women. Research has not examined self-representation of African American women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse considering the ethnic identity development, self-esteem, and self-concept simultaneously, in addition to examining the role of culture. Therefore, the researcher believed that contextualizing the factors, experiences, and people that shape self-representation would provide insight into how childhood sexual abuse affects African American women. For that reason, this study explored how sexual abuse shaped the African American woman's self-representation by contextualizing this experience within the larger cultural context;

thereby, illuminating issues of race, class, gender, and relationships with others. In seeking to understand this experience the study addressed the following research questions:

1. How did sexual abuse shape my self-representation?
2. How did sexual abuse shape my perception of others and relationships with others?
3. How did I transition to a place of healing?
4. How has my understanding of self been influenced by larger cultural discourses surrounding the African American woman?

Employing a feminist theoretical framework integrating the sociological context of race and culture through Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) and women's psychological identity development through Relational Cultural Theory (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1976) will provide insight into the proposed research questions. By employing Black Feminist thought the interaction between large scale social structures and African American women reveal stereotypical images surrounding the African American woman's sexuality. Through Relational Cultural Theory the multiple aspects of self are examined, as it details the importance of connection with others and relationships. Relationships that form healthy connections have the power to heal, whereas, relationships in disconnect may reiterate previous pain.

This chapter will detail the study's research methodology and include reflections regarding the following areas: (a) rationale for qualitative research, (b) an explanation of autoethnography as a methodology detailing the historical context of this methodology,

(c) a critique of the methodology, and (d) the organization of the study including data collection methods, data analysis, interpretation, and representation.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research stems from a constructivist perspective that purports individual assumptions of the world as valid, while considering the complexity of culture in shaping an individual's worldview (Crotty, 1998). Janesick (2003) denoted that queries suited to qualitative inquiry address "the meaning of some component of the context under study, the political, economic, or socio-psychological aspects of organizations, the meaning of an individual's life, or afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted" (pp. 51-52). Since this study was interested in the CSA survivor's experience, a qualitative methodology was most appropriate. From the researcher's perspective, qualitative inquiry was best suited for this study based on the following features: (a) the researcher as a key instrument, (b) an ardent interest in understanding participant's experience in naturalistic settings that do not attempt to test a hypothesis or manipulate the subject, (c) importance of describing complex interactions of factors present in the phenomenon, and (d) examining the experience through a theoretical lens (Creswell, 2007; Heppner & Heppner, 2004).

Rationale for Autoethnography

The field of qualitative research has evolved and transitioned to a postmodernist era that embraces multiple approaches of knowing. This transition has inspired various tools in addressing the process of knowing and telling. The crux of postmodernism examines "the doubt that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the "right" or the privileged form of authoritative

knowledge” (Richardson, 2000b, pp. 928). With the postmodern turn aspects of traditional methods of inquiry such as authorship, reliability, and validity and representation were questioned (Berbary, 2011). This transition in thought introduced a space to question and critique traditional methods of inquiry, in addition to introducing and critiquing new lines of methodological inquiry such as autoethnography.

David Hayano coined the term “autoethnography” in 1979 to describe a genre of writing and research used by ethnographers studying their native people (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Ellis and Bochner (2000) described autoethnography as “autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation” (p. 742). Described as a form of evocative writing, written in first person, autoethnographies are highly personalized texts about a lived experience (Richardson, 2000b). Interestingly, autoethnography seeks to show instead of tell by holding back interpretation and allowing the reader to re-live the events emotionally with the writer. Reed-Danahay (1997) defined autoethnography as postmodern construct that gracefully synthesizes postmodern ethnography and postmodern autobiography.

Futhermore, Reed-Danahay (1997) described this broad scope of writings in the following categories: native anthropology, ethnic autobiography, and autobiographical ethnography. Native anthropology involves members of cultural groups studying their own group (Chang, 2000; Reed-Danahay, 1997). Ethnic autobiographies are self-narratives written by members of a cultural group (Chang, 2000; Reed-Danahay, 1997). Finally, autobiographical ethnography involves researchers interjecting personal experience into ethnographic writing (Chang, 2000; Reed-Danahay, 1997).

As a research methodology stemming from narrative inquiry, autoethnography represents data through stories to develop a deeper understanding of a particular issue. Researchers using narrative inquiry understand that stories are one of the many tools individuals use to make sense of the world. For example, Gabb (2008) explained that:

Narrativisation of experience does not simply tell a story, it constructs an account within the language, conventions, and social milieu that translates experience. Life stories do not mirror life experiences, they re-present them in particular contexts in culturally intelligible formats. (p. 39)

By connecting personal stories to social discourse, narrative inquiry enriches the knowledge regarding human experience. Researchers have used self-narratives such as autobiography, memoirs, journals, personal essay, letters, and autoethnography to explore their experience with a particular phenomenon. As an autobiographical genre of writing autoethnography is often written in first person and represented in CAP texts such as poems, short stories, journals, performance texts, and social science prose (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). For example, in *Final Negotiations* noted sociologist, Carolyn Ellis (1995) described her experience as a graduate student falling in love with her professor dying of cancer.

Although autoethnography is considered a self-narrative deriving from anthropology because of its storytelling aspects, it differs from other self-narratives because it “transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation” (Chang, 2008, pg. 43). Hence, not all self-narratives are ethnographic. As a research methodology stemming from ethnography, autoethnography acquires thoughtful insight into a cultural phenomenon through the use of stories; thereby, connecting personal stories to social discourse (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Reed-Denahay (1997) denoted that the personal and cultural connection was contingent upon

the emphasis on the research process (graphy), culture (ethos), and self (auto). Therefore, if the research component and writing aspect are fluidly integrated, autoethnography can illustrate the rich layers of consciousness regarding a particular phenomenon by connecting the personal to the cultural. This consciousness can be referred to as a critical consciousness. Shor (1992) defined critical consciousness as:

Critical consciousness allows people to make broad connections between individual experience and social issues, between single problems and a larger social system. The critically conscious individual connects personal and social domains when studying or acting on any problem or subject matter. (pp. 126-127)

Therefore, “narratives do not, as it were, spring from the minds of individuals but are social creations” (Murray, Murray, & Chamberlain, 1999, p. 53). The narratives presented in autoethnographies are not the stories of one person. The stories are representative of the larger societal discourse. Examining the phenomenon through an ethnographic framework captures the known and unknown cultural factors influencing personal experience since “authors draw on their own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture” (Holt, 2003, p. 2). By framing individual stories in the context of culture, autoethnography brings cultural understanding. When examining the phenomenon from an inward perspective autoethnography reveals the many aspects of self, acceptance of cultural influences, resistance to cultural influences, and brings understanding to how the participant makes meaning of this experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Therefore, autoethnography does not focus on self alone, but explores understanding of others, culture, and society through self.

With a deeper understanding of self and others, autoethnography can be a very empowering method of inquiry. Autoethnographies can bring “voice” to those

marginalized in society and bring coherence for individuals who seeking to understand how past experience have influenced their life and identity (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Through native autoethnography individuals whose group members have been studied by dominant culture study now instead choose to study their own experience. This empowers the oppressed individuals to give voice to their own oppression and speak for themselves (Reed-Danahay, 1997). This is especially important when exploring the topic of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse poses methodological concerns for researchers because of the topic's sensitive nature (Ellis & Bochner, 2003; Mendis, 2009). From the researcher's perspective (Lister, 2003) investigating sexual abuse is needed as it gives voice to the survivor's experience; thereby, liberating the survivor.

Yet, it is important to note the hegemonic relationship between the researcher and survivor, since the researcher is contextualizing the information through her eyes (Lister, 2003). Through the researcher's contextualization the survivor transitions back into a victim position. Therefore, "survivor discourse about sexual abuse then may be far from "liberatory", as the speaker discloses her innermost experiences to an expert mediator, who then reinterprets the experiences using dominant codes of normality" (Lister, 2003, p. 47). By employing an autoethnographic approach, I am negotiating this hegemonic relationship by serving as the researcher and participant. As the participant I am describing an experience that once victimized me, and as the researcher I am contextualizing my journey as a survivor and investigating how this experience affected my sense of self, how I viewed others, and my relationships.

Critique

Autoethnography has become increasingly popular conduit in researching topics subsumed in social discourse. Yet, it is important to note that the methodological concerns of this postmodern construct have proven problematic (Tolich, 2010). According to Bochner and Ellis (2002) quality autoethnography should evoke emotion and open conversation prompting further exploration of the phenomenon. However, it should be noted that Bochner and Ellis's (2002) perspectives on autoethnography were grounded in subjectivity, which further support the critique of this methodology: an excessive focus on self (Chang, 2008). Autoethnography that places an equal focus on the auto, ethno, and graphy as described by Reed-Denahay's (1997) should reflect an interconnectivity of self and others to avoid an excessive focus on self. Without this triadic balance of auto, ethno, and graphy, there is an overemphasis on narration (Chang, 2008) and an absence of cultural analysis and interpretation.

An additional methodological concern of autoethnography is confidentiality (Chang, 2008). Autoethnographers personal stories are connected to the stories of others since "the narrative is rarely entirely one's own" (Morse, 2002, p. 1159). Therefore some writers may find some difficulty in protecting others intimately connected to the characters and the researcher. Therefore, it is important that the researcher demonstrate anticipatory ethics to protect the identities of others (Tolich, 2010). The use of pseudonyms and noms de plume are tools in minimizing harm and protecting the confidentiality of others. Finally, personal memory as the sole source of data is a concern for researchers using this methodology since it lacks other data to provide for checks and

balances (Chang, 2008). The creditability of personal memory data as the sole source is questioned; therefore, other sources of data collection will be employed in this study.

Methods

As qualitative research continues to evolve, the pressure to maintain its rigor is still a priority. Tracy (2010) highlighted eight criterion for excellent qualitative research such as: (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence. A topic is deemed worthy if it is relevant, timely, significant, and interesting and a rigorous qualitative study incorporates theory, time in the field, data collection and data analysis (Tracy, 2010).

Tracy (2010) defined sincerity as the researcher's ability to describe their subjectivity and transparency regarding methods, and creditability is established through descriptions that show rather than tell a story, are multivocal, and include member reflections, which include member checks. Resonance is created through the text when the researcher influences or moves the reader, thereby producing a text that is considered transferable (Tracy, 2010). Qualitative research that is grounded in a theoretical framework and strong methodology is considered a significant contribution and research that adhered to procedural ethics, cultural ethics, and relational ethics is considered ethical. If the study achieves what it purports and interconnects literature it has meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010).

Data Collection

This autoethnography will describe how my experience with childhood sexual abuse shaped my representation of self, others, and relationships. Through an autoethnographic approach as the researcher and participant, I am exploring my

understanding of others, relationships, culture, and society through self-examination. An examination of self provides “a lens to look through to gain an understanding of societal culture” (Chang, 2008, p. 49). Detailing the impact of this experience will allow me to provide insight as a researcher and survivor, as well as, appeal to those who have encountered this same experience, since autoethnography can help “transform researchers and readers in the process” (Chang, 2008, p. 53). The data collection for this study will include personal memory data, external data, and self-reflective data. The following section will provide an overview of the primary source of data for this study, personal memory data collection.

Personal memory data. Since autoethnography relies on personal data, memory recall can be difficult since it may reveal partial truths and evoke extreme emotion (Chang, 2008). Therefore, employing various methods for personal data collection allowed me to collect data from my past that I have not explored. The collection of personal data methods started in March 2011 and ended in August 2011 and totaling 40 hours. Personal data collection included an autobiographical timeline, routines, an inventory of the self, and a visualization of the self.

Autobiographical timeline. Constructing an autobiographical timeline was a method of chronologically structuring events and experiences that have shaped my personal development. The autobiographical timeline examined educational achievements, personal milestones, and life changing experiences. The autobiographical timeline included the date and a brief account of each event. The analysis component of the autobiographical timeline will examine the circumstances of the event, its importance in my life, and its cultural significance.

Inventory of self. The inventory of self was used to gather and organize autobiographical data. The study employed self- inventory exercises focused on the following themes: proverbs, rituals, and mentors. Exploring proverbs gives insight to group wisdom and values. I created and brief contextualization of proverbs I heard repeatedly in my family, friends, community, and membership groups. Rituals and celebrations communicate what is valued in the family, community, or society. These rituals and celebrations included holidays, personal events such as births, marriage, funerals, rites of passage, graduation, and religious activities. Therefore I drafted a list of personal, familial, and social rituals I participated in and a brief narrative for each ritual. Individuals who have taught me knowledge, skills, wisdom, and broaden my perspective are considered my mentors.

Exploring the mentor-mentee relationship examines the “cultural acquisition and transmission taking place between mentors and mentees because mentors intentionally or unintentionally invite mentees to share their knowledge, skills, and perspectives from their cultural groups” (Chang, 2000, p. 79). This method required me to construct a list of five mentors, a brief description of each mentor, and their significance in my life. The analysis of these themes will explain how my interaction with others influenced my thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors. In addition, the analysis of these themes examined the cognitive, affective, social, and material aspects of the culture I acquired through my interactions with others.

Visualization of self. Finally, the visualization of self through a kinship diagram conceptualized the family relationships that I have with others through birth, adoption, marriage, or other forms of union. The kinship diagram I created included my nuclear

family and extended family. In addition, my kinship diagram highlighted my current relationship with such individuals. The analysis of the kinship diagram examined how my family members have contributed to the shaping of my life.

Self-reflective Data

Raw data collected during the research process (Chang, 2008) is self-reflective data. Self-reflection data collection began in May 2011 and ended in August 2011, and involved introspection, self-analysis, and self-evaluation totaling 30 hours. To identify behavioral, emotional, and cognitive data about my interactions with others during the research process I employed self-reflection data collection methods such as a field journal. The use of the field journal provided me a means of recording and reflecting on experiences during the research process (Creswell, 2007). As the researcher, journaling allowed me to analyze my biases, assumptions, and prejudices effecting the external data collection. In addition, self-reflection exercises exploring personal values and preference, cultural identity, and cultural membership were used for data collection as well.

Personal value and preferences. Cultural values are communicated through moral standards which govern public and private behavior. With this method, I drafted a list of values and a description of these values. The analysis and exploration of cultural values exposed the liking or disliking of people whom I socialize with, activities I engaged in, and materials I possessed and valued.

Cultural Identity. The examination of cultural identity and cultural membership through the use of cultural-gram helped me visualize my social self. The culture-gram explored themes such as nationality, language, ethnicity, gender, profession, multiple intelligences, interests, class, and religion. After I created the culture-gram, I drafted a list

of groups who I am unfamiliar with, dislike, or oppose. Examining these groups explored my feelings toward these groups and the possible origin of these feelings. The analysis of the culture-gram conceptualized the multiple identities I hold in terms of the social roles I play, groups I belong to, diversity criteria I used to describe myself, and cultural identities I ascribe to myself.

External Data

This theoretically-grounded autoethnography included rigorous data collection and analysis to understand sexual abuse and self-representation within a cultural context. Through external data collection I investigated subjectivities through external sources such as artifacts, and official documents. Since this research study included external data collection with human subjects IRB approval was obtained in June 2011 and data collection began immediately. Data entered into a desktop computer was password protected located in my home office. I will store the raw data for at least five years in compliance with American Psychological Association guidelines, and at the end of the data storage time I will shred field notes and erase computer files. External data collection included the examination of official documents, textual artifacts, and nontextual artifacts.

Artifacts

The method of artifact collection originated from ethnography and narrative inquiry, and is used to examine the tangible and intangible representations of culture. Artifacts provide chronological information that establish a timeline in autoethnography, in addition to, enhancing an understanding of self and the self-situated in a cultural context. Artifact collection began in August 2011 and ended in September 2011 totaling

10 hours. The textual artifacts used in this study include official documents, textual artifacts, and nontextual artifacts.

Official documents. As an artifact, the review of official documents not only provided historical significance and represent significant moments in my life. Since entering high school in 1995 I have I have collected and maintained official documents such as my official letters, degrees, and memberships. These documents were produced by social institutions; therefore these documents denote my connection to these organizations.

Textual artifacts. Textual artifacts are tangible manifestations of culture that concern me or were authored by me. Textual artifacts used in this study included newspaper and magazine clippings, a poem, and undergraduate and graduate commencement exercise programs. In addition, a textual artifact that provided an extensive amount of data was my personal produced text that has documented my life since childhood. The use of this textual artifact preserved my thoughts and emotions at the time of the event and is untainted by present perspective. The examination of textual artifacts revealed aspects of culture and my evolving self.

Non-textual artifacts. The investigation of nontextual items provides additional insight regarding cultural values and experiences created by others. In addition, nontextual artifacts communicate stories about my past and present I am unable to articulate. Nontextual artifacts studied included photographs, memorabilia, and CD collections. The examination of nontextual artifacts, reveal the preservation of thoughts and emotions of events that were significant to self-representation and my cultural acculturation. In conclusion, this study produced a large amount of data capturing the

various aspects of self-representation and cultural implications. The following section will provide an explanation of the data analysis.

Data Analysis

In this autoethnographic study data collection, data management, and data analysis and interpretation occurred in a cyclical process that flowed continuously. Using several methods amassed an extensive amount of data. To conduct an intensive examination of the data required a detailed organizational system.

I used my computer and an expandable file folder to organize the data. I created three files on my computer labeled: personal memory data, self-reflective data, and external data. The personal memory data and self-reflective folders included the writing exercises and my personal reflections for each exercise created in Microsoft Word.

The external data folder consisted of a Microsoft Word file of my personal text documenting my life from the age of 7 until the age of 29. The nontextual items were maintained in a brown storage bin that measured 13.00"L x 13.00"W x 10.00"H. In addition, the external data collection folder included an Excel sheet detailing the official documents, textual and nontextual artifacts collected. The following example (Table 1) is an entry of an item from the excel sheet and the details collected on the item.

Table 1

Data Entry Example

Item & Artifact Type	Data Collection Date	Time of Collection	Context of production	Access (location & person)
High school diploma & Official document	May 1998	1994-1998	Completion of high school	Location: TN Person: HS Principal

Each data file was given a descriptor and number. For example, data collected under personal memory was identified as autobiographical timeline (PMD001), routines (PMD002), proverbs (PMD003), rituals and celebrations (PMD004), mentors (PMD005), and kinship diagram (PMD006). Hard copies of the personal memory, self-reflective, and external data such as official documents and textual artifacts were maintained in the expandable folder with descriptors as well.

Data organization. Once I created a system to manage the data, I moved into the next process of labeling, classifying, and logging information. The labeling process consisted of two rounds. In the data management each piece of data was given a descriptor. This descriptor became the primary label and was expanded during this round to include collection time, date, collector/recorder and data source. During the second round, I created secondary labels detailing contextual information.

The primary labels and secondary labels addressed when, who, what, and where. The question of “when” addressed the time of data collection with the primary label and the secondary label identified the original time when the data collection occurred. The “when” question addresses the historical context of each piece of data and the actual thought and feelings I experienced during data collection.

The “who” aspect addressed in the primary and secondary label reveals who collected and recorded the data and it identifies the main characters included in the data set. My personal memory data and self-reflective data was collected and recorded by me. Examining the personal and memory data through this lens revealed the individuals I included as well as omitted. However, my external data such as non-textual artifacts like

CDs are not authored by me. Yet, it is still important to note the people these artifacts describe because it reveals the connectivity between self and others.

The “what” in the primary label denotes the type of data collected through personal memory, self-reflective, or external data. The “what” in the secondary label examined what is described or the main topic the data addressed. The “where” component for the primary label records where the data was collected and the secondary label is where the original physical context of the data is located. To provide a concise overview of my data I created a data log. An entry from my data log is provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Data Log Example

Descriptor	Data collection strategy (Primary labeling)				Data content (Secondary labeling)			
	Date	Collector	Type	Location	Time	People Involved	Source	Place
PMD001	5.5.11	Harris	Do/Autobiographical timeline	Home	1986 - 2004	Self/family /	Self	New Orleans, Tennessee

Once the data was organized, I was ready to begin the analysis process. I did not use a qualitative software program; therefore, I had to create a process to analyze the data.

This process was laborious and took approximately 85 hours. The first step in this process began with identifying recurring themes, patterns, and topics.

Recurring themes, patterns, & topics. The first step of analysis searched for recurring topics, patterns, and themes addressing the central purpose of my research and research questions. I created four files on my computer for the following themes: self-

representation, perceptions, relationships, and culture. I transferred (copied and pasted) the information collected from the personal memory data collection (autobiographical timeline, seasonal routines, inventory of self exercises, and visualization of self) into each thematic file. I completed the preceding process for the self-reflective data and external data as well. Therefore, the four thematic files consisted of information collected from personal memory, self-reflective, and external data.

Self-representation. The first step during this round examined my self-representation. This theme was connected to my first research question. More specifically, this analysis wanted to examine my self-representation before the sexual abuse, during the abuse, and after the abuse occurred. In addition, I referenced the childhood sexual abuse sequela discussed in the Related Literature and Finkelhor and Browne's (1985) Traumagenic Dynamics Model as a reference. I printed the data located in the file: self-representation. I color coded the data (green) for "Self-representation" and coded each line of data looking for thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that shaped my self-representation.

Perception. The second step during this round examined how my perception of others shaped my self-representation. This theme was connected to my second research question. I printed the data located in the thematic file: perception. I color coded the data (pink) for "perception" and coded each line of data examining my perception of other's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, that shaped my self-representation.

Relationships with others. The third step during this round examined my relationships with others. This theme was connected to my second research question and my mid-level theory. During this data analysis I examined my relationships through the

lens of Relational Cultural theory, so I was searching for elements in relationships that represented the RCT components of disconnection/connection. More specifically, examining relationships that encouraged empowerment and authenticity for the both individuals or relationships were an individual has experienced a diminished self-worth. Understanding my relationships with others was important to investigate because relationships shape self-representation.

According to Austin (1996) “the essence of who we are, what we think, and how we talk is contingent largely upon on the others we celebrate” (p. 206). It is important to note, that in this quote and in this analysis “others” does not refer to “the Other” which was described in Black Feminist Thought. Autoethnography uses the term “other” to describe others of similarity and others of difference. Others of similarity (Chang, 2008) are individuals who share common beliefs, values, common identities, or identity with each other, whereas others of differences represent “communities of practices, set of values, and identities different” from the researcher and co-participants or unfamiliar to the researcher and co-participants (p. 134). After I considered the preceding aspects, I printed the data located in the thematic file: relationships. I color coded the data (red) for “relationships” and coded each line of data examining my thoughts, emotions, and behaviors regarding my relationships.

Culture. The fourth step during this round analyzed the aspect of culture. This theme was connected to my third research question and the study’s macro theory. Therefore, I examined the themes of self-representation, perception of others, and relationships through the lens of Black Feminist thought. More specifically, I investigated the stereotypical images regarding African American women, the role of sexual violence

against African American women, and how these views were communicated in the African American community. In addition, this analysis required the examination of cultural themes acquired through other group identities. Chang (2008) defined a cultural theme as an assumption implied or explicitly stated that controls behavior which is approved or promoted in society. The analysis and further interpretation of cultural themes will frame the autoethnography by extending the research back into the cultural context. I printed the data located in the thematic file: culture. I color coded the data (orange) for “culture” and coded each line of data examining thoughts, emotions, and behaviors regarding my culture.

Inclusion and Omission of Data

The second round of analysis examined the inclusion and omission of data. An absence of data can occur because there was no data to record or the researcher intentionally or unintentionally excluded data (Chang, 2008). The omission of data in a study may reveal the researcher or participants’ “ignorance, dislike, disfavor, dissociation, or devaluation of certain phenomena” in addition to providing insight into what is valued or devalued in the culture.

Therefore, the first step in this round of analysis required the examination of data collected from personal memory, self-reflective, and external data according to the four themes to determine what should be included or excluded. The information gathered from the personal memory, self-reflective, and external data collectively produced over 300 pages of information. It was important that I explore events connected to the purpose of the research. Based on the first round of analysis, my experiences from childhood until my last year of graduate school provided a wealth of data that truly emphasized the

impact of childhood sexual abuse on my self-representation. On the contrary, data exploring my life events after graduate school focused more on my professional experiences and spiritual development. Therefore, I decided to focus on my experiences occurring from childhood through graduate school.

Personal memory data. With the data now filtered, the second step during this round was to determine what information I would further explore from the personal memory data. During the first round of analysis, I noticed another theme connected to self-representation was education. Exploring my educational achievements was important because this theme contributed to my developing self-representation throughout my childhood as well as during my postsecondary education. There were many significant moments regarding the theme of education.

However, it was important I explore the educational milestones of significance so I chose the moments that could provide additional insight into the research. For example, my kindergarten graduation was important. Yet, the teachers who aided in my development and growth during this time were more significant. Therefore, this aspect was explored and included. I used this same approach for examining life changing experiences. For example, my family moved approximately eight times during my childhood. However, the transition that I chose to explore is my family's move from Louisiana to Tennessee, because of the major transition that occurred for my family and me.

Self-reflective data. The third step during this round was to determine what information I would further explore from the self-reflective data. During the first round of analysis recurring themes present in the self-reflective data collection focused on cultural

themes. The analysis and exploration of cultural values exposed the liking or disliking of people whom I socialize with, activities I engaged in, and materials I possessed and valued. For example, one cultural value I was taught and I still practice is the importance of greeting individuals when you enter a room. My greeting others denotes humility on my part, and acknowledges the presence of another person. Moreover, the examination of my cultural identity conceptualized the multiple identities I held in terms of the social roles I play, groups I belong to, diversity criteria I used to describe myself, and cultural identities I ascribed to myself. My culture-gram examined the following identities: nationality, race/ethnicity, gender, profession, multiple intelligences, interests, class, religion, and language. Although my identity as a US citizen is important, the cultural themes of intersectionality (race, class, and gender) warranted further exploration because of its impact on my self-representation.

External data. The fourth step during this round determined the information I would further explore from the external data. During the first round of analysis recurring themes present in the external data collection focused on the study's four major themes. The analysis of official documents revealed the social standards, norms, and values I was expected to uphold. The official documents chosen to include for further analysis were connected to significant events explored in the personal memory and self-reflective exercises. Hence, the inclusion of my high school diploma, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and exclusion of my kindergarten certificate.

The textual artifacts examined in the first round of analysis focused on the study themes: self-representation and culture. The primary textual artifact was a personally produced text of approximately 200 pages. As stated previously, the second round of

analysis of personal memory data resulted in the study covering my childhood-graduate school experience. Therefore, the personal produced text during the second round of analysis was reduced to approximately 125 pages. Other textual artifacts included in this second round of analysis were newspaper and magazine clippings and commencement exercise programs. A poem I wrote in college about my experience with sexual abuse was excluded to protect the identity of the abuser.

The non-textual artifacts examined in the first round of analysis focused on the study's four themes. The investigation of nontextual items provided additional insight regarding cultural values and experiences created by others. The examination of nontextual artifacts, revealed the preservation of thoughts and emotions of events that were significant to my self-representation and cultural acculturation. The first round of analysis included nontextual artifacts such as: photographs, memorabilia, and CD collections. During this round of analysis I decided to exclude the use of photographs, to protect the confidentiality and privacy of others. Including the use of music was important because music communicates a shared experience that is shared with the larger culture. Additionally, this analysis revealed that that music could communicate deeper emotions I was unable to express.

Thematic Connections

After completing this second round of analysis I quickly realized that the four themes were interconnected and could not be addressed exclusively. During the first two rounds of analysis fragments of data associated with one theme were also associated with another theme. My self-representation was shaped by my perceptions of others, my relationships, cultural influences, and my experience with childhood sexual abuse. My

understanding of childhood sexual abuse was shaped by relationships, others perceptions, and cultural influences. My perception of others was contingent upon my relationships, my experience with childhood sexual abuse, my self-representation, and cultural influences. The cultural themes that aided in my acculturation impacted my self-representation, my experience with childhood sexual abuse, perception of others, and relationships. During the previous rounds of analysis I attempted to separate themes that were complex and interrelated. With this revelation, I wanted the representation to represent this complexity as well. In order to represent the thematic complexity I chose to present the data chronologically in a story format. The following section will detail my rationale for the representation and representation construction.

Representation

As noted in the rationale for qualitative research, the postmodern turn introduced new ways of knowing such as autoethnography. This postmodern turn also introduced a crisis in representation where qualitative research was experimented with innovative ways of telling or representing the lived experience (Parry & Johnson, 2007). This change in thought introduced a space where qualitative researchers were invited to show more reflexivity, incorporate various genres of writing such as autoethnography, and produce rich descriptions. This new form of representation is known as creative analytic practice (CAP).

Instead of forming generalizations or simplifying data CAP contextualizes experiences; thereby, highlighting the many perspectives that contribute to the lived experience (Janeswick, 2003; Parry & Johnson, 2007). Qualitative studies employing CAP use the process of crystallization to illustrate that the researcher's perception of the

participants' experience is contingent upon the researcher's lens. This lens could be personal experience, beliefs, or a theoretical framework. Through crystallization the researcher gains meaningful insights, yet there are still many other facets the researcher is unable to identify (Janesick, 2003). Therefore, CAP addresses the privileged process of writing; thereby, allowing the researcher to explain their claims of knowing and position of self.

Creative analytic practices provide researchers a space that “encourages involvement, inspires curiosity, creates inclusivity, and constructs depictions that remain in the thoughts of readers in ways that traditional representation sometimes do not” (Berbary, 2011, p. 195). To maintain this flexibility, CAP is held to high and difficult standards. Richardson (2000a) proposed the following criteria in evaluating CAP: (a) substantive contribution; (b) aesthetic merit; (c) reflexivity; (d) impact; and (e) expression of reality. A substantive contribution should bring an understanding of our social life while integrating a social scientific perspective (Richardson, 2000).

A text that is aesthetically pleasing invites readers to make their own interpretations and is artistically shaped. The art of reflexivity is revealed by the author's transparency regarding methodological considerations and positionality, and the impact of the representation should garner new questions of discussion regarding the topic (Richardson, 2000a). Finally, the piece should speak to lived experiences that are representative of some aspect of social discourse. The representation in autoethnography is considered a creative analytic practice since CAP “balances the line between fact and fiction” (Berbary, 2011, p.186) by embracing creative genres such as poetry, narrative, performance pieces, fiction, conversational and critical representations (Parry & Johnson,

2007). The use of CAP also complements one of the core aspects of Black Feminist thought which encourages African American intellectuals use of personal experiences to express the African American woman's standpoint; thereby, adding to the growing body of knowledge regarding African American women.

Autoethnographic Writing. Autoethnography can employ four different writing styles in the representation: descriptive-realistic, confessional-emotive, analytical-interpretive, and imaginative-creative (Chang, 2008). Writers can integrate the various writing styles based on the purpose of the research, readers, and writer strengths. Based on the purpose of this research, readers, and the researcher's strengths, the representation will present a mixed genre of artistic pieces employing the various writing styles.

The first writing style I will use is confessional-emotive writing. Chronological sequenced, confessional-emotive narratives will invite the reader into my world as the participant. Autoethnographies employing confessional-emotive writing expose confusion and problems, thereby, inviting the reader to participate in the story and evoking empathy (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 1996, 2002; Richardson, 2000). This emotional evocation can be viewed as an emotional catharsis (Bochner & Ellis, 2002) or self-indulgent (Chang, 2008). Therefore, these narratives will uncover the intense dialectical tensions I experienced from my earliest childhood memory until the summer of 2004 regarding the phenomenon under study, while exposing the cultural influences shaping my experience.

Second, I will use Imaginative-Creative writing. Imaginative-creative writing is often presented in the form of mixed genres such as fiction, poetry, screenplay, or monologues. The external data collection included an examination of nontextual artifacts

such as music. To provide a background into the narrative, each narrative is described by a song. The lyrics of the song are poetic in nature and provide an additional perspective into my experience. These lyrics will provide another medium for exposing my lived experiences as the participant.

Third, I will use descriptive-realistic writing. This genre of writing is used in narratives to depict places, people, and experiences as “accurately” as possible. In addition, this writing is designed to bring the reader into the writer’s world with the intention of creating minimal character judgment and evaluation. Finally, I will use analytic-interpretive writing. This form of writing connects two important components present in qualitative research: analysis and interpretation. In my analysis I identified the four major themes: self-representation, perceptions of others, relationships, and cultural themes were interconnected. The representation will highlight these themes; in addition, an explanation of the thematic interconnectedness will be discussed in the interpretation. Moreover, this writing will show a relationship between my experience and its connection to the larger culture.

Content Development

Developing the narratives posed some difficulty because I wanted to construct a representation that was transferable to women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse or to individuals interested in understanding the impact of this experience. I knew that I was able to convey the emotion of the experience, yet as a scholarly piece of writing I had to address trustworthiness. Before I embarked on the journey of constructing the autoethnography I reviewed other dissertations using this methodology as a frame of reference. I reviewed approximately five dissertations and the methodology

component addressed the history and purpose of autoethnography; however, data collection or analysis was not addressed. Therefore when I found Chang's (2008) *Autoethnography as Method*, I was thrilled to have a guide in the data collection and analysis component. Addressing this component is important because it focuses on the 'graphy' portion of auto-ethno-graphy. Again, the "graphy" portion is the component that moves my experience from a narrative to actual research. I was excited to have this reference, but actually incorporating this into a dissertation study was still difficult. So I started with the data and began constructing the representation with external data.

The first step in content development was reviewing the external data, more specifically, the personal text documenting my life since childhood. Starting here alleviated some of the difficulty because this text was formatted in narrative form. Additionally, the second round of analysis omitted data unrelated to the primary purpose of the study. These 125 pages represented raw data collected at the time of the event. This data provided the historical context of the event by capturing my thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in real time. I considered re-storying the data from the personal text. However, it was important that I present my story as I experienced it instead of re-presenting through my current perspective. Additionally, the personal text allowed me to incorporate quotes, actions, behaviors, and observations as experienced in the moment.

The second step in the content development included incorporating the personal memory data and self-reflective data reflections. Starting with the autobiographical timeline and routine exercise I incorporated and expanded the significant events included from the second round of analysis. The autobiographical timeline and routine exercises served as guideposts by ensuring that the narratives maintained a chronological sequence.

The remaining personal memory data exercises and self-reflective data exercises were integrated into the representation to contextualize the narrative and highlight cultural themes, or the reflections from these exercises were included. The last step in the content development was incorporating the non-textual artifact: music. I chose to incorporate this analysis by introducing each narrative with a musical piece from the data analysis. In addition to naming the narrative after a song, the musical lyrics were included as well. The rationale for the musical lyrics is explained in the narrative interpretation.

Representation development. The goal of this autoethnography was to explore my experience with CSA and its impact on my self-representation, perception of others, relationships with others, while addressing the cultural implications. As stated in the data analysis, the representation addresses my experience from childhood until my graduation from graduate school. Therefore, the autoethnography is presented into three chapters that capture the essence of my experience. The three chapters address the four major themes and research questions.

Representation piece 1. The first piece includes four narratives and begins with my earliest childhood memories and ends with my departure to college. This piece will provide an extensive examination of my family dynamics, relationships and perception of others, cultural membership, and experience with CSA. The primary geographical settings for this piece are Louisiana and Tennessee. The actual events described take place in my home, school, parental and maternal grandmother's home, and church. The characters described in the narratives were my parents, siblings, extended family, peers, and community members. The physical characteristics of these characters were not included to protect their identity, and each character was given pseudonyms as well. I

created a composite character, Aunt Juanita to represent the qualities of the women I encountered throughout my childhood that negatively shaped my self-representation. In addition, I created a composite character for the abuser.

Representation piece 2. The second piece includes seven narratives. The second piece will describe my undergraduate experience. More specifically, this piece exposes the various tensions I experienced that challenged my value system, my fragile self-representation, and the effects of CSA in my intimate relationships. In addition, this piece details the beginning of an intimate relationship and becoming a member of a sorority which recognizes the significance of connection in relationships. The primary geographical setting for this piece is Murfreesboro, TN. The actual events described take place at different settings at my college such as my residence hall, academic buildings, and dining hall. The new characters introduced in this narrative include roommates, an intimate partner, and sorority sisters. The physical characteristics of these characters were not included to protect their identity, and each character was given pseudonyms as well. Other identifying characteristics such as socio-economic class, group associations, and academic or professional interests were changed or not disclosed.

Representation piece 3. The third piece and final piece includes five narratives. This piece will describe my transition as an undergraduate student to a graduate student. This piece describes the ending of relationships and friendships, and a fragmented self that is seeking wholeness. In addition, this piece details the ending of my intimate relationship and losing friendships with members of my sorority which explains the significance of disconnection in relationships. The primary geographical setting for this piece is Murfreesboro, TN. Much like the second piece, the events described take place at

different settings at my college such as my residence hall, academic buildings, and dining hall. The new characters introduced in this narrative are peers I befriend during my time in graduate school. The physical characteristics of these characters were not included to protect their identity, and each character was given pseudonyms as well. Other identifying characteristics such as socio-economic class, group associations, and academic or professional interests were changed or not disclosed.

Interpretation and Conclusion

The interpretation piece will illustrate the connections between my experience and themes presented in the theoretical framework. The data analysis identified the interrelationships between the themes presented in the representation. To understand the cultural meaning of these themes requires interpretation. The goal of interpretation in this study seeks to answer the question, “What does this mean?” These meanings are not explicitly stated in the representation; therefore, as the researcher it is important to address these meanings. More importantly, the interpretation will connect the themes and relationships discussed in the narratives to the theoretical framework of Black Feminist thought and Relational Cultural Theory, as well as the literature regarding child abuse. The interpretation will follow with the conclusion. The conclusion will discuss my healing process and re-discovery of self.

A House Is Not a Home

A chair is still a chair
Even when there's no one sittin' there
But a chair is not a house
And a house is not a home
When there's no one there to hold you tight
And no one there you can kiss goodnight
Woah girl

A room is a still a room
Even when there's nothin' there but gloom
But a room is not a house
And a house is not a home
When the two of us are far apart
And one of us has a broken heart

Now and then I call your name
And suddenly your face appears
But it's just a crazy game
When it ends, it ends in tears

Pretty little darling, have a heart
Don't let one mistake keep us apart
I'm not meant to live alone
Turn this house into a home
When I climb the stairs and turn the key
Oh, please be there
Sayin' that you're still in love with me, yeah

I'm not meant to live alone
Turn this house into a home
I climb the stairs and turn the key
Oh, please be there, still in love
I said, still in love, still in love with me, yeah

Are you gonna be in love with me?
I want you and need you to be, yeah
Still in love with me
Say you're gonna be in love with me
It's drivin' me crazy to think
That my baby couldn't be still in love with me

(Vandross, 1989, track 8)

Narrative Background: The following narrative is based on my childhood experience dating from the age of 5 until the age of 9. This narrative will describe family dynamics and the impact of domestic abuse on my siblings and me.

The smell of the kerosene burning in the heater, and the sound of wind beating the tin roof are reminders of a life I try so desperately to escape. As the sunlight pours through the kitchen window-the only source of light for our cold, dark house- I awake from a restless sleep on a pallet with my sister on the cold kitchen floor in front of the open oven door. The birds are chirping, so I know it is time for me to prepare for school.

“Get up Michael it’s time for school.”

My younger brother, Michael rolls over on the pull out couch and groans. Some children hate the thought of school, but I love school. School is my haven, my escape. We moved to Tennessee from New Orleans, LA two years ago when I was seven years old. I miss my friends in New Orleans, but in some ways I am happy we moved. As I head to the closet to pick out my clothes, thoughts of New Orleans bring back memories of nights of eating crab legs, listening to New Orleans music, and closing my eyes as we crossed the Greater New Orleans Bridge over the Mississippi River. Somehow, the good memories never outweigh the bad.

The trouble occurring inside the walls of our house was nothing compared to what was going on outside the walls of our house. We did not live in the safest neighborhood that was for sure. Although I was a young child and naïve, I was somewhat aware of my environment. We lived on Fourth Street in New Orleans,

only a couple of blocks away from the projects. In New Orleans, I attended John W. Hoffman Elementary school five minutes away from my home. My older sister, Tracey was responsible for walking me to school in the morning, and I had to walk home every day promptly after the last bell rang. My mother was there waiting for me, and I was always happy to see her face.

One day I decided to take a different route home. I decided to go to the neighborhood store to purchase some cookies. Some generic Oreos to be exact! I couldn't wait for the bell to ring so I could get my cookies. Thoughts of white crème between two chocolate cookies were running through my mind. I saved my ice cream money over the week, so I had a little change to purchase my cookies. As I casually walked home, I savored each moment of being independent...and my cookies. As I reached the corner, I saw my mother crying in the front yard. My elderly neighbors were outside as well. They were looking for something or maybe someone. Once they saw me, I had some idea I was the individual they were looking for and the mission was solved.

“Baby come here” my mom said while sobbing.

“Momma what's wrong” I ask while wiping tears from her eyes.

“I was worried about you. You know you're supposed to come right home.”

My mom replies sharply while wiping the crumbs from my face.

“I just wanted some cookies momma. I'm sorry” I reply apologetically.

I finally understood my mother's concern for my safety when I witnessed a horrific event. One night my family and I were watching television and we heard a cry from across the street. Rushing out the front door, we saw a neighbor running down the street clutching her stomach.

“Help.... Help....someone call the police,” she cried.

I stood there in shock, as most of my family, and the neighborhood. I do not know if we were shocked because this woman was running down a street with a bloody wound or if we were upset because of her behavior. She ran to the end of the block, and suddenly the ambulance arrived on the scene. As they lifted her body into the ambulance, I caught a glimpse of her swollen face. It was Coby’s mother. Coby was my classmate. Where was he? What was he thinking? We all wait for the ambulance to depart, and slowly return to our makeshift fantasies. Unable to demonstrate emotion for an event you learn to witness on a daily basis.

Our neighborhood in New Orleans was filled with drugs, alcohol, poor people, sad people, hurting people, and high crime. Every day grown folks talked about the troubles of life, and they looked so sad, defeated. Most people received food stamps or some government check. Life was good around the first of the month, and you prayed that you could make it to the end of the month. My mom stayed home like most mothers in the neighborhood, and my dad worked. My family was one of the few families on the block that had a mom and dad, and I couldn’t understand why. How do you grow up without a dad? My friends and I played on sidewalks with dirty needles, but we had the watchful eyes of mothers and grandmothers to ensure we knew the danger of those needles. Despite the negative obstacles we faced to survive in this environment, the neighborhood kids had surrogate parents that were always on the watch.

Older individuals in our neighborhood with beautifully crafted Creole and Cajun features true natives of New Orleans refused to leave; although the neighborhood was declining. Some would consider the older folks homes

shotgun shacks, but to them it was a mansion because they owned them. The elders believed in beating you when you were out of line and then called your mother to tell her what happened, while you cried only hoping that the beating at home was less severe.

The teachers at John W. Hoffman had the same beliefs. My school wasn't in the best condition, but the teachers were truly committed to giving their students the best education. My classmates and I had no pre-kindergarten education. So my teachers had to work extra hard to teach us basic skills. Every day after school my first grade teacher, Mrs. Pepper tutored me. My tutoring continued at home with my father as well. He often became frustrated, nevertheless, he remained committed to helping me to excel. I had the same problem in the second grade as well, and my teacher Ms. Cabanaw gave me the same tutoring and guidance. Ms. Cabanaw looked like the women from my mom's favorite soap opera, All My Children. She was white, tall, with long blonde hair and pretty. She looked like my Barbie dolls I got for Christmas, and I wanted to be just like her.

Back to life...back to reality. Tracey is in the shower, my younger sister Rosalyn is ironing her clothes, and Michael is still asleep on the couch. I promise he does this every morning. He waits ten minutes before the bus comes to get his lazy behind out the bed. I know he ain't washed his behind. He's a boy so, you know he doesn't believe in bathing.

"Tracey hurry up I need the hair grease." I yelled at the top of my lungs.

With so many people in the house, you would think we would bathe the night before. No, that was using wisdom. I took my shower the night before because I hated waking up in a cold house. We didn't have a central air unit. Our heat is an old wood heater and kerosene heater. The wood heater kept the house warm most of the time, but during the night the fire would go out. So the next morning we're usually shivering dreading the cold, wooden floor.

"Shemika plug up the iron and my curling irons. " Tracey yelled from the bathroom.

Tracey always tries to boss me around like I'm her kid or like she's the mom. Sometimes she is the parent. When mamma is drunk or unable to function, Tracey is the mom. You know, I really do not know if my dad loves my mom. I think he loves her, but they are always fighting. I thought that if you loved someone, you wouldn't do anything to hurt the person you love. I believe my dad is angry because he is ashamed of my mother's alcoholism. I know mamma has a drinking problem, but I love her. When we moved to Tennessee, I hoped the madness would end. Maybe mom will stop using alcohol, and she can be her old self. Whoever that is, I am not sure.

We moved to Tennessee because my dad is starting his business, and we are closer to his family. The move to Tennessee is affecting the family in different ways. My older sister, Tracey is attending high school and involved in every extra-curricular activity. Sometimes I hear my sister confiding in my aunts about the kids picking on her because of our family. Sometimes my sister acts different when she is around her friends. Although Tracy gets on my last nerves, I admire her in so many ways. I have three younger siblings as well. Since Tracey takes

care of me, I feel somewhat responsible in taking care of my younger brothers Michael and Ray. My younger sister Rosalyn is independent in every since of the word.

“Michael can you please get up. We only got ten minutes before the bus comes. If you miss the bus you know daddy got to take you to school.”

I whined to Michael, but he is the least concerned about my whining. In some ways, I know he’s trying to miss the bus so daddy can take him to school. I hated when my dad had to take us to school because we were always late. I mean, always. Not five minutes late, not ten minutes late, more like a half an hour or an hour late. I told daddy we were penalized for being tardy, but he had other things to worry about.

Yeap, I already knew it. Michael is trying to miss the bus so he can ride with daddy.

Then there is me, Shemika. I am not a daddy’s girl and I am not a mama’s girl either, I am just out here. I am not a daddy’s girl, but I love my dad because he works so hard to take care of our family. Whether it is rain, sleet, snow, or sunshine, my dad will do whatever is necessary to take care of his family. Whenever things go wrong, I usually blame my mom. I believe our life would be perfect if mom would quit drinking. We are starting a new life, so I hope my mom will stop drinking. Mom’s drinking is sure to cause an argument between my parents. My mom always argues with dad or Tracey. I do not know why, but she treats Tracey different. My mom is always nice to me, but she is very mean to Tracey. When Tracey needs or wants something, she always asks my dad. Anytime my dad agrees with Tracey my mother becomes outraged. I hate when

mom is upset, and it seems like every weekend my parents fight. Sometimes they try to hit each other with the closest object, sometimes a knife or a gun is drawn. Every weekend I try to spend the night with a relative. Sometimes I can get away, other nights I have to stay. When my parents fight, I used to run to Tracey and cry. Then I learned crying was not going to stop my parents. Now I don't get scared when they fight, really I don't think about it. I read a book or play with my dolls. Michael and Ray often say, "Meka make them stop," but I could not. Michael is usually quiet and very sensitive. If you yell at Ray, he trembles and cries.

"Momma wake up" I whisper quietly so I wouldn't wake my dad.

"Momma please wake up" I beg as she continue to snore.

I shake momma, and beg her to get up from the bed. My mom was a heavy sleeper; well not really, it is called a hangover. I stood over her shaking her, and begging her to get up. I could get myself ready, but I wanted her to comb my hair. If she did not comb my hair Tracey would, and Tracey had heavy hands. Tracey wants to become a beautician, so she thinks I'm her guinea pig. She's always trying new styles on me.

"Mama... Mama... come on and get up". I whine, but she's not moving.

Daddy is lying on the other side of the bed knocked out as well. I guess they were both tired. They were up the night before arguing into the early morning. I guess that's why she can't get up and comb my hair.

"You plug up the curlers Meka?" Tracey yells from the kitchen.

"Yeah they plugged up in the bathroom" I respond.

I guess this means Tracey is doing my hair this morning. Man, I knew I should have asked momma to roll my hair last night. I have some pink foam rollers I use when momma gives me a fresh press. It used to look good, until momma decided to give me a relaxer. Now when I use the rollers they make my hair look frizzy.

“Come on Meka let me do your hair.” Tracey yells from the bathroom.

Reluctantly, I walk into the bathroom. Tracey curls my hair, and gives me a couple of pony tails.

“Can you give me a bang Tracey? I ask softly.

“No, you don’t need a bang.” Tracy responds sharply. See, that’s another reason why I didn’t like Tracey doing my hair. She always did it the way she wanted to do it.

“Please Tracey, I just want a little bang” I plead.

Tracey decides to give me a bang. Since she curled my pony tails, it was only right for her to curl the bang... nope. She just left it there. So I decide to curl it. Big mistake. This is my first try at the curling irons, but I knew it couldn’t be that hard. As I wrap my hair around the barrel, I drop the curlers. Before the curlers hit the sink, they hit my forehead first.

“Meka, the bus is coming down the hill” Rosalyn yells as she walks out the door.

Man, I can’t get on the bus like this. I got this big curler burn sitting on my forehead, and it hurts. I put some Vaseline on the burn in hopes of soothing the pain. Now my forehead is extra greasy. I wanted to ask momma for a band aid, but I already knew we didn’t have one.

I think my parents believe their primary responsibility is to provide their children with clothing, food, and shelter. I know my brothers, sisters, and I love my parents. We know my father came from a poor family, and had to leave school to work to take care of his siblings. My parents try their hardest to make sure we have a roof over our head, lights, food to eat, shoes on our feet, and clothes on our backs, but I don't know sometimes I want more. Not more clothes, toys, or things. Sometimes kids need love. Kids need to feel love and they need stability. My favorite line from one of Luther Vandross' songs is "a house is not a home." A home has parents who love each other and do not fight in front of their children. Loving words creates the sweet aroma in a home not words that can tear into a person's soul.

"Shemika the bus is out here. Come on before you miss the bus." Tracy yells as she walks out the front door. As I walk out my house, running up the hill to catch the school bus the thought runs through my mind, will I ever have a home?

Vision of Love

Treated me kind, sweet destiny
Carried me through desperation to the one that was waiting for me
It took so long, still I believed
Somehow the one that I needed, would find me eventually

I had a vision of love and it was all that you've given to me

Prayed through the nights, felt so alone
Suffered from alienation carried the weight on my own
Had to be strong, so I believed
And now I know I've succeeded in finding the place I conceived

I had a vision of love and it was all that you've given to me

I had a vision of love and it was all that you've given me

I've realized a dream, and I visualized
The love that came to be, feel so alive
I'm so thankful that I've received the answer that heaven, has sent down to me

You treated me kind, sweet destiny
And I'll be eternally grateful
Holding you so close to me, prayed through the nights
So faithfully
Knowing the one that I needed, would find me eventually

I had a vision of love and it was all that you've given to me

I had a vision of love and it was all that you

Turned out to be

(Carey, 1990, track 1).

Narrative Background: The following narrative is based on my childhood experience dating from the age of nine until the age of twelve. This narrative will describe my relationships with my extended family members and developing self-representation in the areas of beauty and sexuality.

We visit my dad's family every weekend, every holiday, and visit them all the time. My Grandma Corine, my mom's mother and Uncle Danny, my mom's brother are the only individuals we associate with from my mother's family. I guess they are right when they say opposites attract. My mom's family is very different from my dad's family.

My Grandma Corine is a very giving woman. Grandma Corine listens to gospel music on the highest volume, cans her own homegrown fruits, and freezes everything just in case there is a bad winter. She complains about everything and everyone being too loud and how running in her house runs up her electricity. She is a true entrepreneur by heart. When the opportunity to earn money comes knocking at her door she takes it. When the opportunity to earn money is not at her door, she goes out to find it. If she had to sell candy, ice cream or sodas, pick apples, or look after the sick she could and would do the job humbly.

"Yall get up out that bed" Grandma Corine yells as she walks down the hallway.

I roll over pretending not to hear her. She's walking down the hallway singing a gospel song and cursing at the same time.

"And if you peed in the bed I'm beat ya .."

Well, you already know what she said, no need to repeat it.

“Danny I’m tired of you. I’m tired of you coming in late at night. I’m tired of you eating up my food. I’m tired of you. You need to go and stay with one of them whores you been sleeping with.”

Ahhhhh, this is heaven. Grandma Corine is always complaining. Although she complains, I love visiting Grandma Corine. My Grandma lives 20 minutes away from us, and visiting Grandma Corine is always a treat. Every time we spend the night with Grandma Corine, she wakes us no later than 7:00 in the morning to clean the house. We clean, scrub floors, wash dishes, wash clothes, and hang the clothes on the clothesline in her backyard. While we are cleaning, she plays her gospel music, and of course sings her own version of each song. After we finish our chores, we sit and talk to my great-Grandma, Rosie.

“Shemika go feed daddy Stant”

Granddaddy Stant is Grandma Corine’s daddy. Grandma Corine’s mother, Rosie died a couple of years ago. Every time we do something bad, Grandma Corine says that Grandma Rosie’s hank would get us. I was scared of the hank. I didn’t want to feed Granddaddy Stant, but I had enough sense not to say that to my grandma. She would have slapped me, and not thought anything about it. I cringe everytime she asks me to feed daddy Stant. I think his room is scary. It’s filled with all of these machines and it smells like Bengay. Sometimes he tries to talk, but he does not have any teeth.

I whisper to Michael, “Go feed daddy Stant”

“But Shemika, I thought grandma told you.” Michael says with fear in his eyes.

“Come on Michael if you feed daddy Stant I will buy you some ice cream when we go the grocery store.”

Reluctantly Michael agrees, “ Okay Shemika I’ll feed him.”

While Michael is feeding granddaddy Stanley, I proceed to work crossword puzzles with Grandma Corine. At my Grandma’s home, I earn extra money to purchase ice cream at school. Sometimes my Grandma gives me change and my Uncle Danny pays me a dollar to iron his clothes. My Uncle Danny was F-I-N-E, and he knew it. He always had the girls, and he always looked good. Every time he got ready to go out, he asked me to iron his clothes. He taught me how to iron his pants with the sharp crease. He also showed me how to mix flour with water, and use it as starch. See, that is the poor man’s starch. Sometimes you can’t afford what they sell in the store, so you got to adapt. Even when Grandma could afford the pink and bluish looking starch, he always used his homegrown formula because it made his pants look real stiff. Almost too stiff. That’s the way he liked it, so that was the way I ironed them. If I did a really good job he would pay me extra money. He didn’t have to pay me because I adored my Uncle Danny. He was like my big brother.

“Danny... you were out last night with that Woods girl wasn’t you?”

Grandma yelled from the kitchen.

Here they go. It’s about that time. My grandma’s always arguing with Uncle Danny about the girls he dated.

“You know she ain’t no good”

“How you know Corine?” Danny yelled as though his feelings were hurt.

“Cause her mom was a whore, her grandma was a whore, so she a whore”

Grandma stated in a matter of fact tone.

“You ought to quit talking about people”

“I ain’t talkin about nobody. That is the truth. I even tell her she is a whore.”

The funny thing, or maybe not so funny thing is, my grandma was telling the truth. If she talked about you, she would tell you. She had no qualms about telling you what she really thought about you. You could always count on her to shoot it straight with you.

Grandma Corine continues with her rant. “You need to get a job. You think you grown coming in at 4:00 in the morning. If you that grown you need ya own house.”

“How you know I came in at 4:00 in the morning, you were sleep. I heard you in there snoring. You don’t know what time I came in. You just want something to complain about.” Uncle Danny yelled from the hallway as he tiptoes into the bathroom.

“Well if you don’t like my complaining get the hell out of my house.”

Grandma Corine yelled.

“You don’ t want me to leave. If I leave who you gone complain about Corine?” Uncle Danny jokingly argued, and that was the end of the discussion.

It’s amazing how they argue, and then my Uncle Danny would use his charm on my grandmother. She would call him everything but a child of God,...literally. Then the next minute give him \$20.00. After he got his money, he was gone for the rest of the day. We wouldn’t see him until late in the evening.

The highlight of our day is helping my Grandma with her various errands. My Grandma's friend, Steve often accompanies us on our interesting journeys to the post office, electric department, or grocery store. Of course, we have to wait in the car while she handles her business. We sit in the car with Steve while he smokes on a tobacco pipe. Our behavior on these expeditions would determine if we would get a great meal or leftovers. If we behaved, she would make some of the best spaghetti and banana pudding. If we misbehaved, she still made the best spaghetti and banana pudding. As a form of punishment, we had to cut the tomatoes and peppers from her garden for the spaghetti. Making the banana pudding is my favorite. I am in charge of placing each vanilla wafer strategically in the skillet because she did use a baking pan for her banana pudding. Each banana slice is the same size of the vanilla wafer, although we ran out of bananas because I ate most of them. Before bedtime, she gave us a bath, patted a rosy-smelling white powder all over our bodies, and made us watch Nightmare on Elm Street before falling asleep. She always separated me from my siblings and made me sleep with her. My Grandma's bed is at least three feet high because she has five quilts or more on her bed. All through the night, she moans a gospel hymn. I lay there shaking because I knew Freddie was sure to get me.

My Grandma and Uncle Danny are the only real link I have to my mother's family. My mom has an aunt and uncle who live in driving distance, but we do not see her much. The rest of my mom's family lives in New York, Colorado, and Alabama. My Grandma, Uncle Danny, and my Grandma's sister and brother are the only family members living in Tennessee.

On the other hand, spending time with my father's side of the family is quite different. Tracey has a close relationship with my aunts, but I do not. For example, one day I was over Grandma Jane's house. I was on the porch talking to my friend Tim from school. It was summer time and I was looking for something for my cousins, siblings, and I to do that was fun. So I decided to have kickball tournament with the neighborhood kids. It was about 15 kids in the neighborhood, and Tim was the only one that had the kickball. I knew if I wanted to have the tournament I had to invite Tim. So were trying to organize a kickball game for the neighborhood kids. My dad's sister, Juanita pulls up and began taking grocery bags out the car. She started walking towards the porch and immediately starts yelling.

"What your hot ass out here doing?" Aunt Juanita asks with frown on her face.

"Nothing Aunt Jaunita, we just talking" I replied embarrassingly.

"Naw your hot ass out here trying to coat" she responded looking at me judgmentally.

"Hey I'm talk to you later, I got to go." Tim says nervously taking his kickball and heading back home.

"No I'm not Jaunita we were just talking about kickball. That's all." I said defensively.

"Don't talk back to me. I know your little fast ass out here doing something. Keep it up here and you're going to be pregnant before 16." She said as she walked in the Grandma Jane's house.

I sat on my grandma's porch confused. What was hot and what was fast? Why is that every time I'm talking to a boy I'm fast or I'm hot. What is coating? Is that even a word? So talking to a boy means I'm going to be pregnant by 16. I have to use the bathroom so I go into Grandma Jane's house. I had to walk through the kitchen to get to the bathroom. Before I shut the screen door Aunt Jaunita picks up where she left off.

"You need to sit your hot ass down somewhere" looking at me suspiciously. Grandma Jane chimes in, "Don't go in my refrigerator either, ain't nothing in there for you."

"I'm just going to the bathroom" I respond with an attitude

"Don't be getting smart with me little girl" Grandma Jane yells with her hands on her hips.

Instead of using the bathroom, I turn around and walk back outside. I didn't want to use her bathroom. I did not have a close relationship with my father's mother, Jane. Although I spend a lot of time with my dad's family, I feel like we are a burden. When I am around my dad's family, I notice things. My grandma Jane had her favorites, and we were not the favorites. My dad had three sisters, Aunt Denise, Aunt Jaunita, and Aunt Lynette. Aunt Denise wasn't around much because she was working. My Aunt Jaunita had three boys and she was the youngest girl. My Aunt Lynette is the middle girl and she is everyone's favorite. My Aunt Lynette has two children Ashley and Adrian. Ashley and I are the same age. Actually, we are one month apart. Even my dad's sisters treat Ashley and me different. My aunts praise my cousin Ashley because she has beautiful hair and because of her mom. However, my siblings and I rarely receive this attention. I

guess I want this attention because I do not receive this attention at home. With my parents I never hear how pretty I am, how I am smart, or how they love me. I guess if no one is telling you these things it's for a reason. Sometimes the comments are hurtful. I told my dad about the mistreatment. My father addressed the situation. Of course, they denied these things, and they treated us different for a while.

Although I do not have a strong relationship with my father's family, I want their love and approval. Maybe I am not close to my aunts because we lived in New Orleans, while the rest of my family have always lived in Tennessee. Maybe we are not close to my dad's family because of my dad. Maybe they do not like us because of my mother. I notice the looks they give my mother when she is drunk. They roll their eyes, ignore her, or walk away when she is talking. I do not know why they hate me or hate my family. It is difficult for me to understand why they do not love me. It is difficult for me to understand why they do not care. I see the families on television. The families are always happy, laughing, and supporting each other. In my mind, this is my vision of love. Maybe I had the wrong vision of love. Maybe I had the wrong vision of what love could become.

Beautiful Girl (Lattimore, 1999, track 7)

Beautiful girl, beautiful girl
I think I've found myself an angel
A pretty girl who makes my life complete
Ever since the day I found her she's all that I dream
No other so lovely I've never seen such a face
There are no words that can explain
The feeling she gives me
And every time that she smiles and I look in her eyes

I fell in love with a beautiful girl
There's no one that compares to her
Never thought I'd be so lucky
Beautiful girl, beautiful
I wanna make her mine forever

I've been far from perfect
She's had plenty reason to leave, ooh
But somehow she forgives me
From the life I used to lead
I never imagined I could be the one to perceive
Someone as beautiful as she
And every moment that I live and I breathe
She makes my life so sweet

I will always love her for the woman she is inside
Her love's as pure as water that flows when my well is dry
Oh I'm in love

Narrative Background: The following narrative describes the confusion I experienced during my adolescence. This narrative will contextualize the role of poverty and its connection to mental illness and describe my experience with sexual abuse.

It's May 1992, and Tracey is graduating from high school. She's leaving home. I do not want Tracey to leave home. In so many ways, we need Tracey, and I think my siblings and I feel alone. I guess we feel abandoned because Tracey is like mom. More than often, I view her as the mother when my mom could not be a mother. Before we moved to Tennessee my momma had an accident in New Orleans. My mom was standing on her mattress trying to change her light bulb when she fell and fractured her ankle. I remember my mother being on crutches for what seemed like years. Although it was a couple of years later, the injury still caused my mom excruciating pain leaving her bedridden many days.

Since my sister is leaving, it is time for me to take Tracey's role. Ready or not, it was time for me to be the responsible sibling in this house. I begin caring for my entire family. I am the individual who cleans the house, washes the clothes, and hangs the clothes outside on a clothesline in the dead of winter because we could not afford a dryer. I keep the yard looking somewhat descent so my family wouldn't be considered heathens, learn to cook, and prepare my siblings for school. Having this responsibility feels overwhelming sometimes. Like Tracey I am heavily involved in extra-curricular activities to escape my home life. I am a cheerleader, in the marching band, honor classes, etc. It is difficult trying to find the balance between being a child and being an adult.

Although my sister left, I am happy for her. She is out experiencing life something I long to do. I think my sister and I are looking for the same thing, and that is love. Although I am only a thirteen, I can understand the need for love. The love she and I want is not the love you see on television on the soap operas when mom makes me close my eyes or leave the room. I believe it is a love that is unconditional. The love where a person is there through the good times and bad times, they hug you, and tell you how special you are.

I guess if you look hard enough for anything, you will eventually find it. Tracey found the man of her dreams, or so she thought. He is from a good family, respectable, and he has goals for his life. He has all these things, but somehow their relationship is not going well. Sometimes I overheard them arguing on the phone and hear her crying over him. I overhear her telling my Aunt Juanita about her relationship with Kent.

“I don’t know Aunt Juanita everything was fine, but now he’s different” Tracy says sadly.

“Different like what” Aunt Juanita asks with concern.

“I mean Kent is acting different. He was talking about how his family told him he needed to watch out for me.” Tracy reveals with hurt.

“Watch out for you how?” Aunt Juanita asks with confusion.

“His momma told him he needed to be with a girl that was going somewhere, someone going to college. I’m not going to college but I got a job. I’m going somewhere.” Tracy states proudly.

“Yeah, I know but you know Kent people always thought they were bigshot. They always thought they were better than everybody else. How he know

what your people are like when he's never met us." Aunt Juanita responds with disappointment.

"I know but I can't bring him here Aunt Juanita" Tracy states adamantly.

"Why can't you bring him here?" Aunt Juanita asks curiously.

"Aunt Juanita I don't want him to see our house. Daddy got all those old trucks outside. Dogs just roaming around with no home, and I don't want him to see where I live" Tracy remarks with shame.

"Yeah... you right I understand. Well, you about to move anyway. You got a job at the new factory in Jackson and you about to get a car. You trying to do better so his family will notice this and he will change his mind." Aunt Juanita says reassuringly.

I know this sounds crazy, but in Tracey's mind and my mind, it was logical. I mean we were poor, most people in our family fell in the traps that caught the older generations, and people judge you base on your upbringing. They judge you by the clothes you wear, the house you live in, and the car your parents drive. If you live in a nice home, wore nice clothes, and had a nice car you are someone of value. If you do not have those things, well you're nothing. Although Tracey tried, the relationship ended. I was hurt because I knew my sister really loved this person. I want her to be happy because she deserves it. Tracey was very sad, and one night we got a call. Tracey attempted suicide.

Here we go again! Two years earlier, my mother attempted suicide. I remember the event like it was yesterday. As usual, I led the intervention team along with my other siblings. We had another or attempted to have another talk with my mom about her alcohol abuse. My father was present and eventually

joined the conversation. This argument eventually became a full blown fight. My mother was so upset she locked herself in the bathroom. She took an unknown amount of various prescription pills, and when we found her, she was unconscious. When the ambulance arrived, I was so afraid she was dead. My siblings and I felt guilty because we had driven her to this extreme. The doctors saved my mother's life, but they knew she needed help. The doctor recommended my mother to seek counseling for her addiction at a rehabilitation center. I remember coming home to an empty house and not seeing my mother. It was a daily reminder of the guilt my siblings and I harbored for hurting my mother.

“Daddy when momma coming home?” Ray asks sadly.

“She won't be home for another two weeks. My father responds.

“Two weeks, daddy what are we going to do for two weeks.” I ask with concern

“Who gonna take care of us if momma not here daddy” Rosalyn asks as tears fall from her eyes.

“Well Daddy can't you go and get her?” I ask my dad with hope.

“No she has to stay for two weeks” My dad responds sadly.

We cried and begged our dad to bring our mother back home. We knew she had a problem, but we would rather have her home with us than to have her locked up. We pleaded with our father, and he brought our mom home days later. Here I am two years later living this grief again. I feel great sadness because my sister is in such grief. I was now beginning to understand that some dark cloud was over my family. How could life ever seem so bleak that you would take your own life?

Tracey moved out and her relationship with Kent ended. Although Tracey moved out, things remain the same. My mother was still drinking and our family was still struggling financially. I try to make sense of my family finances, even as a child I couldn't understand why we were always struggling. It's like we can never manage to get ahead. The winter of 1993 my Uncle Ralph, my father's brother moved in because his girlfriend put him out. My father agreed to provide my Uncle Ralph with lodging, and my uncle agreed to pay \$150 a month towards the bills. Uncle Ralph paid on time the first two months, and he stayed for free the rest of the year.

Winters were the worst for my family. My father does construction work and if the weather is terrible, he could not work. Sometimes I come home to a quiet and cold home. It is funny; before I arrive home, I knew our electricity was disconnected. Some nights I have to do my homework before dark, if not candlelight would be the guiding light. Having no electricity is hard, but having no food is another thing. Coming home where there is no food is not a good feeling. Although we had financial difficulties, my parents tried to make a way. Sometimes they would pick up aluminum cans or sell scrap metal. Some nights my parents sip coffee because there is not enough food for everyone.

Every month I expect the electric, phone, or some utility to be disconnected. Paying bills on time is not a priority. Right before Valentine's Day in 1993 Jerald, my boyfriend, decided to break off our little relationship. Well he tried to call me and guess what. Our phone was disconnected. I went to school the next day, which was Valentine's Day expecting a gift. The boys in my class

informed me Jerald ended our relationship with me because my phone was temporarily out of service or disconnected. He was now in a relationship with another young woman I thought was a friend. Of course, I cried but I had three other guys give me roses that day. It is childish, but I was hurt he broke up with me because our phone was disconnected.

We are on food stamps, and shop at thrift stores. Sometimes I am ashamed to go to school because my clothes are terribly worn, too big, or my shoes are coming apart. Christmas is the only time we receive new things but as I become older, we could not count on Christmas. Christmas is my favorite holiday. It is not because of the gifts. Many holidays we did not receive anything because my parents did not have the money. My parents would try to make a way, but there were Christmases where there were no gifts under the tree. The first Christmas it hurt, but eventually I learned to get over it. I am old enough to understand why we did not have gifts, but my younger siblings did not understand. Tracey tried to compensate, but it is not her responsibility. Although I understand, it hurts on Christmas day when my cousins have new clothes and new shoes. My siblings and I pretend we are fine, but inside I know we are not.

Who knew that being a teenager could be so hard! I'm in the eighth grade and my body is changing and I know it is changing. I'm feeling different emotions, and I am thinking about things I have never thought about before. I always liked boys but now I'm liking boys in a different way. I like talking on the phone with my boyfriend and I like when he holds my hands. It's all innocent, but physical touch, affection is foreign to me.

All of sudden I have hips and my behind is getting bigger. I don't know how to handle these changes, and apparently it is not a good thing.

"Meka what are you doing" Tracey inquires as she's sitting on the couch.

"I'm eating some cookies what it look like I'm doing" I respond back. You ask a dumb question, expect to get a smart answer.

"Hmphh...you need to put those cookies down" Tracey responds sharply

"Yeah you picking up some weight" my dad chimes in while eating spaghetti.

These incidents began to occur more frequently, and my father and Tracey are always talking about my body. Although I am a size six, they think I am overweight. I didn't think I was fat but maybe I am. So I work out, run, and I do not eat. I have to be perfect. Being perfect means skipping meals and working out, so I have to do it. My mom is trying to lose weight as well, and she has lost over 60 pounds in the past two years. When we were in New Orleans, mom was much heavier. Daddy would always compare her to my Aunt Lynette who maintained a slim figure despite having two kids. Although my mother doesn't know it, I have started taking her diet pills. My mom keeps her Dexatrim in a shoebox in her closet. I've been taking the pills, and I've noticed that I'm not as hungry. I wonder if she notices the pills are missing. People praise me for being a good student, helping others, and staying in shape. I consider these three abilities as my strengths, and I have to do these three things well or people won't love me or like me.

Every day and night, my mom plays the radio as if we are having a house party. The funny thing is we sleep through it. Tonight wasn't any different from any other night that summer. School started in two weeks and I was thinking about my new school and new classes. As I fall asleep, a shadow lurks outside my bedroom door. My sister is snoring loud as always, and I roll over to look out the window. The moon is shining through my blinds, and the door opens.

As the footsteps creep into the room, I could hear the floor creak, as the steps slowly reach my bed. I could hear someone breathing. A hand slips under my blanket, and I could feel a hand, a cold calloused hand, touching my body. The hand starts to trace the outline of my body. What is this person doing? Who is doing this? Why are they touching me? Should they be touching me? Hell no, they should not be touching me. Questions race through my mind as the hands cup my breasts, and caress my stomach and thighs. Now the hands are going somewhere I know they should not go. The hands finally rest in a place that is pure to me. I could feel the rough hands rub between my thighs. I want to cry because it is so painful, but I keep my eyes closed too afraid to see who this evil person could be. Once he finishes I hear the footsteps walking away. The hall light shines into the room as he opens the door. I could hear the radio blasting an Isley Brothers' song, "Between the Sheets" as the tears roll down my face. I just want to die. I feel so nasty, and so used. I did not want to look. However, I want to see who could do this to me. As I roll over, I see the shadow of a male figure. How could he do this to me?

It's the most wonderful time of the year....the beginning of school. It's my freshman year and I decide to join the band. My band teacher says that the flute is the most difficult instrument to play in the band because it requires the most air. It was my goal to be first chair, and that goal was easily accomplished within a month of my freshman year. In order to remain at the top I had to be the best so I would practice every day after school. I wanted to be the best and when I played my flute I was swept away with the melodic tones vibrating from my flute. Swept away to anywhere I wanted to be, anywhere but here at home.

"Meka, we about to play Frisbee," Ray exclaims excitedly at my door.

"Ummm...I'm practicing my flute" I say casually

"You always playing that flute. You can play with us for a little bit." My brother says to coax me to come along.

"No I need to practice." I state firmly and look down at my music stand.

Actually, I love Frisbee. I remember last summer my siblings and I would have Frisbee tournaments with my cousins who lived next door. I took the top from the Turner Ice Cream bucket and used it as a Frisbee. Of course we couldn't afford one. In any case you learn to make do with what you have. I was determined that my siblings and cousins would have a great summer even if we didn't have much. That summer our parents promised to take us to Tornado Hill a waterpark 30 minutes away. We were so stoked about the trip and when July approached I knew we wouldn't see the park. So I decided to take the tarp my dad used to cover his truck and create a make shift slipping slide. The tarp was a little rough on our skin so the crew and I rounded up trash bags and they worked

perfectly. I would have to say this past summer was full of good times, well until a couple of weeks ago.

Now that fall is here the summer seems like ages ago. Instead of playing with my cousins after school, I'm in my room playing my flute or I'm reading. I quit the cheerleading team. My coach was disappointed with my decision. I know I'm good because I won Most Valuable Team Member and Most School Spirit the year before in eighth grade. However, I think its best that I focus on my academics. Before my freshman year, I graduated as the salutatorian of my class. I remember winning eight awards at the graduation ceremony that my family didn't attend. I brought my awards home and my mom placed them on the table in the hall. When my next door neighbor's sister, Rhonda found out that I won she purchased me two dresses. I remember when she brought the dresses over I was so surprised, happy, and thankful. I wasn't accustomed to getting anything for doing something positive. Academics became my main interest as I could see the long term benefits. Although I enjoyed cheerleading, quite honestly, I didn't want people gazing at my body.

So this new body is becoming shapelier. So I started wearing my mom's clothing. I was a size six and mom was a twelve, but I didn't care how I looked. I dressed like a teacher and not a teenager. I remember all my friends were wearing tennis skirts. One evening my siblings and I were at the convenience store with my parents. One of my peers walked past our vehicle.

"I like her skirt" Rosalyn remarks coolly.

"Yeah, I like it too," agreeing with Rosalyn.

“You don’t need to be wearing nothing like that” my dad yells angrily from the front seat.

“Why! Ain’t nothing wrong with her skirt” Rosalyn replies in defiance.

“So you want men looking at you like that. You ought not want to be dressed like that” my dad replies with a scowl on his face.

“Well I don’t think anything is wrong with her skirt.” Rosalyn responds.

“Well when a man tries something you did it. You ought to want to carry yourself in a better way.” my dad answers in a criticizing tone.

“I’m getting the skirt.” Rosalyn responds and laughs.

Honestly, I admire my sister’s spunk. Regardless of what my dad thought she always stood up to him. I wish I was more like her. I agreed with my sister. I didn’t see anything wrong with the skirt. It was the appropriate length mandated by the school policy. As we rode back home that night I was thinking why did my sister and I have to be concerned about how we dressed. I mean why were old men looking at young girls anyway? Shouldn’t old men be looking at old women? My dad’s response gave me the impression that women shouldn’t look nice or desire to attract any unwanted attention. Attracting unwanted attention meant that you (the female) wanted sex. We weren’t even going to get into the topic of sex because well my sister and I knew that topic was off limits.

I knew this topic was not discussed because of what happened before. I remember when my sister and I were younger, let’s see I would have been maybe nine and my sister was seven. We were singing a pop song by Color Me Badd, *I Wanna Sex You Up*. Rosalyn and I were walking around the house crooning...Ohhhhhhhh I wanna sex you up. My dad got so upset that we listened

to gospel music for the next two years. We were only kids, but my dad's reaction gave me the impression that sex was bad. So bad that you should only want to listen to gospel music.

After the incident at the store, the next week my dad gave Rosalyn and me a hundred dollars for school clothes, and reiterated his strict views regarding tennis skirts. My sister and I could wear the same clothes, so we purchased items we both could share. Rosalyn bought a tennis skirt, like she said she would. At the end of the day Rosalyn was going to do what she wanted, whereas I obeyed my father's wishes as usual.

Although I tried to protect myself by wearing baggy clothes and keeping busy with extracurricular activities the abuse continued throughout my freshman year. I don't remember what a peaceful nice sleep felt like during that time. Some nights I would spend the night reading to deter the advances, but my sister wanted the light off so she could sleep. I'm afraid of the footsteps at night. So, I ask my youngest brother, Ray who was five years old to sleep with me. I held Ray at night like a teddy bear just praying God would allow me to have a night without him, but those prayers fell on deaf ears. Sometimes when I see him, he gives me looks that make me freeze with so much fear. The looks like he could see through me... see through my clothes. Those looks were warnings that later that night he would be coming. I would hear the door open and those familiar footsteps approach my bed. Slipping his hand under my blanket, the cold-calloused hands began rubbing on my thighs, and I hate the coaxing. "Don't you want to make me happy, don't you want to become a woman, don't you want to be a good girl?" No I don't want to make you happy, not this way. I want to

become a woman, but this isn't the way it's supposed to happen. If I'm not a good girl, then what am I? Maybe I'm not a good girl. This wouldn't happen to good girl so does this mean I'm bad? I'm so confused. I allow the fondling to persist hoping this will quench his lustful desires. While he pleasures himself in front of me I focus on God. I visualize myself in church, praying at the altar. I'm at the altar, wearing a white dress, praying and asking God to forgive me for not being a good girl. God please forgive me for all the times I told white lies. Forgive me for the times I didn't do right by my siblings or cousins. I know I'm a bad person, and bad people shouldn't ask for much. But God please let me keep my virginity. I don't want new school clothes, I don't care about Christmas gifts, and it's okay if I have to go without. Just please, please God don't let him take my virginity away from me. He can have everything else, but please don't let him take that away.

Four Seasons of Loneliness

I long for the warmth of days gone by
When you were mine
But now those days are memories in time
Life's empty without you by my side
My heart belongs to you no matter what I try

When I get courage up to love somebody new
It always falls apart cause they just
Can't compare to you
You love won't release me
I'm bound under ball and chain
Reminiscing our love as I watch four season's change

In comes the winter breeze
That chills the air and drifts the snow
And I imagine kissing you under the mistletoe
When springtime makes its way here
Lilac blooms reminds me of the scent of your perfume
When summer burns with heat
I always get the hots for you
Go skinny dippin' in the ocean where we used to do
When autumn sheds the leaves the trees are bare
When you're not here it doesn't feel the same

Remember the nights when we closed our eyes
And vowed that you and I would be in love for all time
Anytime I think about these things is shared with you
I break down and cry cause I get so emotional
Until you release me I'm bound under ball and chain
Reminiscing our love as I watch four seasons change

This loneliness
Has crushed my heart
Please let me love again
Cause I need your love to comfort me and ease my pain
Or four seasons will bring the loneliness again
(Boyz II Men, 1997, track 3)

Narrative Background: The following narrative details my experiences during high school. This narrative will explore the significance of relationships with mentors, in addition to illustrating my desire to form a connection with my mother.

High school is not much different from any other stage in life. Well, that is not necessarily true. Things are changing, and I am afraid. I am afraid because there is so much that I should know, but I do not know. If it were not for my friends and God, I would not know many things. Usually your mom is the one who teaches you how to shave your legs, how to apply make-up, how you should wear a slip under your skirt, how to walk with confidence, how to speak quietly, or how a woman should demand respect from a man. My mom could not teach me these nuggets of wisdom, and so I learn elsewhere.

Elsewhere is sometimes my friends. Elsewhere are the snickers from my peers. Elsewhere are the women at church who correct my ignorant behavior.

“Child where is your slip” Ms. Betty asks while shaking her head

“Ummm... I forgot to put one on.” I respond with embarrassment. I didn’t forget. I just didn’t have one.

“Well didn’t somebody see ya before you left the house? Lord these children come out looking any kind of way” Ms. Betty turns her back walking to her designated pew.

Yes I should have on a slip, and next time I will remember that. Yes, someone should have checked me before I left the house but no one’s checked me before I left the house since I was nine. I thank God for the women at church who

correct me, but many times, I am ashamed. I am ashamed because I know there are some things I do not know. I know secretly they are judging my mother, because I should know better. Yes, I should know better, but I do not want their pity or for the women judging my mother. My mom is lacking in some areas. However, she is my mother and I love her.

I know people talk about my mom, and how her drinking is steadily growing worse. During my sophomore year of high school, my mom began to change. I think one day that she decided that she no longer was a wife or a mother. I believe she is going through a mid-life crisis, identity crisis, or a mental breakdown. Whatever it is, it's changing her. My mom quit doing all the things most mothers or wives would do. She spends most of her time asleep, listening to music, and drinking. She dresses like a teenager, she talks differently, and she acts differently. When I come home from school, I am interested to see what character I will talk to that day. Sometimes she is Erica Kane and sometimes she is Chaka Khan. Although I am a teenager, I could recognize my mom is changing because she did not have a chance to finish her childhood, enjoy being single, or accomplish her life goals. Since the age of 16, she's been a mother and a wife. I did not know my mom. I do not know what my mom likes or what her dreams are. I feel my mom lives vicariously through her children, my father, my father's sisters, and the characters on television.

The relationship with the women in my family did not change or improve. Tracey became pregnant with her first child, during my sophomore year so she moved back home. Tracey moving back home is not good for me mentally. Tracy and I constantly argue. Well, Tracey's constantly picking arguments with

me. She ridicules me on my physical appearance. If Tracey sees me eating she will say, “Shemika, you are going to be fat.” This would hurt my feelings and of course, I start working out even more. If Tracey could not get me with my weight, she would attack my physical appearance. “Shemika, why is your nose so big?” Instantly I ran to the bathroom to look in the mirror, and actually wonder why is my nose so big? Sometimes I wear a clothespin on my nose and constantly pinch my nose to make it smaller and narrow.

My relationship with my dad’s sisters were still the same. Throughout my childhood I grew accustomed to hearing how other girls were pretty, and I never heard those comments. I could see the favoritism towards the girls who had a lighter complexion than me, and I am constantly criticized regarding my physical appearance. I tried to disregard the comments, but it seems like I could never fit whatever image they wanted. I did not understand. It is not as if I am overweight or ugly. At least I don’t think I am.

Although I am having problems with some women, I can count on three women in my life for support. Those three women are my Aunt Denise, my church member Rita, and Grandma Corine. My Aunt Denise developed my love for reading. She is the individual I can communicate with on a personal level. We read books, did book discussions, and she listens to my opinions. My Aunt Denise allows me to be me, and she never judges me or ridicules me. I know Rita because of church. Through Rita, I am now active in the church and I am beginning to learn more about God. Rita is aiding in my development as a Christian, teaching me about Christian values, and showing me my spiritual potential. Rita is the individual who speaks positive words over my life. She is intelligent, opinionated,

giving, ambitious, prissy, and she loves God. I really believe that Rita wants the best for me.

Now that I am older, I view my Grandma Corine differently. My Grandma Corine is the woman who teaches me strength. My Grandma Corine teaches me how to believe in something better. My Grandma raised my mother and my uncle by herself. She supports herself and many times my family financially. Although my mom is married, my Grandma feeds and clothes us a great deal of the time. Sometimes my Grandma gives me a glimpse into my mom's side of the family. My mother's family members are all leading successful, fulfilled, and happy lives. I can see how God is blessing their lives. She declares that I am from greatness, and she expects the same greatness from me.

In addition to these strong women, I had friends and church members that cared for me as well. I became friends with three young women name Laquanda, Endia, and Amy. Laquanda, Amy, and I were in the same grade and became good friends because we are in band together. I met Endia in band as well, and we instantly clicked. I had other friends, but I consider these women friends because they know the real Shemika. They know the home I go to, they know about my family, they know about my situation, and they accept me. This acceptance is something I desire, because I know I am different from my peers. When visiting my peers' homes, I quickly realize how my peers and I live different lives. I quickly learned domestic and alcoholic abuse were not normal activities in every home. Therefore, I kept my home life secret. I visit my friends often, but I am too ashamed to allow them to visit my house. My father actually encourages us not to allow other people to visit our house since we are not living up to par with others.

However, there was one friend that visited my home often and he didn't care if my mom was drunk. I became especially close to a young man name Marshall. Marshall recently moved to Tennessee from Chicago, and we clicked instantaneously. We share the same interests in music, books, movies, and I love Marshall because he loves to listen to me. I always joke my husband must love me more than Marshall does because Marshall loves me unconditionally. We are only friends, and his friendship is teaching me how to be a friend. He is a great motivator and regardless of my situation, I know he loves me for me. One of my church members, Mr. Lance McClendon took me under his wing. He is a retired navy officer, and he believes in the value of education. He motivates me, and constantly supports my academic endeavor.

I always hear what's wrong, and never what's right. I look to my family for affirmation, and I can never seem to attain it. It's funny that the love and affirmation I should receive from my family comes from people outside my family. My family notices the relationships I have outside the family and remind me blood is thicker than water. This proverbial message was stated to remind me that my family should come before anyone. I love my family but this message is difficult for me because why should I place my family as a priority when I'm not a priority to them. This blood is thicker than water message is also used to justify the offenses of others. Blood is thicker than water explains why my mother stays in a relationship with a man who physically abuses her. Blood is thicker than water explains why my uncles still communicate with a relative that raped my Aunt Lynette. In other words, regardless of the wrongdoing committed by a family member, family takes precedence over others. I have trouble accepting this

belief, because I have experienced more hurt from my family than my friends or others. So although blood is thicker than water, I'm thirsty for a sincere friendship. I'm thirsty for people who care about me.

So...boys...you know there are so many of them. So many vying for my attention, yet having a boyfriend is different now since you're expected to date. Date means going out in public places, visiting each other's homes, and meeting family. I am from a small town where everyone knows everybody's business. Everyone knows my mom is an alcoholic, and knows my family has many problems. Although I've been sheltered, I know people judge you based on your money and your family. Since my family is poor, I felt this would ultimately hurt me. I hear old people say good fruit produces good fruit, and bad fruit produces bad fruit. Good fruit cannot produce bad fruit, and bad fruit cannot produce good fruit. Like my Grandma Corine told my Uncle Danny. Danny's girlfriend mother was a whore and the girlfriend's mother was a whore. Therefore, the girlfriend was a whore as well. According to my community, I am born from bad fruit and there is no possible way I could be or produce something that is good.

So now, I have my "official" first crush, Jason. Jason is an upper-classman, cute, and from an upstanding family. His parents are active in church, financially stable, and highly educated by my community standards. Jason confirmed my suspicions during one of our conversations on the phone.

"So where do you want to go to college" I ask Jason.

"I'm thinking about TSU. My older brother goes to school there" Jason replies.

“TSU that’s right next to MTSU” I respond with my excitement regarding MTSU. Although I hadn’t visited the campus, I knew I was going to school there.

“Yeah, I think so. So what about your older siblings? Where do they go to school” Jason inquires in a casual tone.

“Ummm....my older siblings didn’t go to college. I will be the first person in my family to attend college.” I proudly respond.

“Oh, I heard your family is wild man....like they get real wild ” Jason remarks with a sense of shock.

“What you mean” I ask defensively.

Jason takes a slight pause and responds, “I mean...I just heard your family drinks a lot and I heard one of your family members is on crack.”

“I mean my family drinks sometimes. So are you considering any other schools? I ask casually to change the topic and move on.

I cannot deny the rumors because the rumors are true. I know his mom. She is cordial, but I know she thinks her son deserves better. Further conversations reveal his parents disapproval regarding our budding friendship, and eventually he stopped dating me. This is definitely a shock back into reality. I can’t control what my family does, yet, I feel like I’m being judged because of their choices. I’ve felt this way before, but this situation taught me that some people judge you on where you from not on where you’re going.

So I was determined to prove those people wrong. The people who think that I’m going to become another welfare mother, drug addict, or abused wife. I decide to apply myself academically, attend college, and leave this life behind. Attending high school heightens my aspirations to attend college. Since I cannot

change my past, I refuse to stay in an environment I believe hinders me. Instead of seeking ways to attain a car, the trendiest clothes, or date I focus on school. I am heavily involved in school and church. I know school is my ticket out of my current situation, and the church is going to pray me to the promise land whatever that may be.

Since my freshman year I've been enrolled in advanced courses, and remained active in various activities. Being involved in extra-curricular gives me an excuse to be absent from home, in addition to, meeting different people and doing something positive. My sophomore year I drafted a list of goals to accomplish that would fulfill my dream of attending college. The goal was to attend college, complete law school, and then make lots of money! I expressed my desire to become an attorney to many of my teachers and administrators. I guess the desire didn't fall on deaf ears, because in the summer of 1996 I received a surprise in the mailbox. I was nominated to attend the National Youth Leadership Forum on Law and The Constitution December 3-December 8 in Washington, D.C.

The National Youth Leadership Forum on Law and The Constitution introduced high school sophomores, juniors and seniors from across the nation to the field of law. Throughout this six-day program, students would meet and personally interact with professionals from some of the nation's top law firms, observe the legal process in action and meet faculty from renowned law schools. Students would test the fundamentals of constitutional law through simulations and directly engage in debate over some of the most important legal issues facing our country. As I read the nomination letter to my parents I could see them

beaming with pride and excitement as well. After I read the letter to my parents I called the office for more details.

The forum required a tuition fee of \$2500.00 to cover accommodations, meals, and supervision. My parents were concerned about the tuition fees; in addition, I was responsible for securing transportation to Washington, D.C. Although the amount frightened my parents, I wasn't discouraged. It was June and my tuition fees were due in October. This gave me at least four months to raise about \$2000.00 to cover the tuition, transportation, and other miscellaneous fees. So I developed a pledge campaign, and made a list of individuals who I knew were willing to donate. Once I got through my list of church members, which was only seven, I knew that I would have to seek assistance from the community. I drafted and typed a donation letter in the computer lab after school, and mailed the letters to businesses in the community.

After seven days I called the businesses to inquiry about their possible commitment. There was one attorney I was unable to reach, so I decided to visit her office. I told her about my desire to attend the conference and requested financial assistance. She was impressed by my determination and donated \$150.00. Most donations ranged from \$25.00-\$100.00 and over time I reached my goal. Although my church was a small congregation consisting of no more than ten members, they agreed to purchase my plane ticket. This was my first time traveling on an airplane, and I was venturing into uncharted territory. I found the number to Memphis International Airport, and was routed to a service specialist. I explained my situation and learned the reservation process. I

acquired the check from my church, mailed the check to US Airlines, and my ticket was confirmed. I was going to Washington, D.C.

My parents were responsible for transporting me to the Memphis International Airport. This was an hour and half trip from my hometown, and I made sure my parents departed on time so I wouldn't miss my flight. While my father drove to Memphis all of I could think about was DC. I was about to board a plane, and I'm going to DC! My parents were pretty quiet on the trip, but I think they were nervous. They hadn't traveled on a plane, or been thousands of miles away from home. I think in their mind they were unsure of what to say to me. Once we arrived at the terminal I checked my bags, and my parents walked me to my gate. For the first time in my sixteen years, I heard my parents say I love you. I was shocked. I didn't know what to say. I had never heard those words from my parents so I was unsure of what to say. I think I said I love them as well, but honestly, I was so in shock I don't remember.

Once I got to my gate, I anxiously waited to board the plane. That's when I discovered I had two tickets. So it appears that I'm flying to Chicago and then DC. At that moment I wasn't quite sure what that meant, I just knew I had to be flexible and roll with the punches. My trip to Chicago was surprisingly pleasant, and I wasn't nervous. It should be noted that Memphis International Airport is relatively small. So when my plane landed at O'Hara I was speechless. Chicago O'Hara looked like three Memphis International airports. So I learned that my connecting flight was departing within 45 minutes. Once I entered the gate I was bombarded by large screens displaying information continuously changing. Fortunately the customer representative at the gate directed me to my next gate

and I made my flight. As I walked through the chaotic airport all I could think about was making my next flight. Once I boarded my flight I was relieved that I had successfully handled the unanticipated surprises.

Once I entered Reagan airport I was excited to get to the hotel, but I couldn't find my luggage. After some investigation I was informed that my baggage was misplaced and would be delivered to my hotel. Instead of panic a peace fell over me. I knew things would work out so I could relax. Then it hit me, the hotel. I had made plans to get to the airport, but I had not arranged for transportation to the hotel. So I stood there in the middle of the airport thinking of the next step. I saw the taxi cabs outside, and I had the hotel information. I asked the taxi if he could drive me to the Omni Hotel. He gave me the fare amount, and I hopped in the taxi. Its 10:00 p.m. and I'm out carousing the streets of DC with no supervision, although I wanted it for safety reasons. I thanked God I arrived at the hotel in one piece.

The next days in D.C. were comprised of meetings and classes on the legal profession of law. Although I enjoyed the educational portion, what I enjoyed most was meeting new people. Meeting students from the different parts of the US revealed me that I could go anywhere. Once I returned from DC life was back to its same routine, however, I was pumped. As I transitioned into my senior year, I was more motivated than ever to get the hell out of dodge. I researched colleges and attended recruitment fairs. I borrowed ACT study books, and studied every day. I applied for every scholarship available. During my senior year, I was offered scholarships from various universities, but one school caught my attention, MTSU. The spring semester of my senior year, I had the

opportunity to visit this university. One of my classmates is attending this school, so I visited with her. Once I stepped foot on the campus, I knew this was the school for me.

Graduation is here and I'm happy this journey is coming to an end. I am receiving the rewards of four years of hard work. I graduated eighth in my class, received many awards and local scholarships, and a full ride to the university of my choice. The day of my graduation I ran to my Grandma' Jane's house to ensure my Aunt Denise's attendance at my graduation.

"Hey Jane" I said to my grandmother

"Hey. You know one day ya gonna call me grandma. That's disrespectful to call a woman my age by her first name." My grandmother said harshly.

"I'm sorry grandma." I said reluctantly. Saying grandma Jane just didn't sound right to me.

"Where is Nise?" I asked my grandma.

"She in there on the couch in the living room" and went right back to frying her chicken.

"Hey Nise!" I said with excitement; however she wasn't excited at all. She didn't look well. My Aunt Denise or Nise as we call her looked really emaciated. She is a petite woman and only weighs a good 100 pounds. Her face looks gaunt and her eyes are swollen.

"Hey Shemika" Nise murmurs weakly.

"You alright Aunt Nise" I asked

"Naw baby I don't feel real good. I think I'm tired from working all those hours at the factory. I just need to get me some rest." She says weakly.

“Are you coming to graduation?”

“Yeah I’m going to be there, with both of my nieces graduating you and Ashley. I can’t miss that.” She says with a smile. She closes her eyes and drifts back off to sleep.

Bombarded with hugs and tears from my family, I am ecstatic graduation is over. I am so happy and relieved I accomplished this goal. Momma wants to take all these pictures, and Grandma Corine didn’t make it. There is Aunt Lynette, Ray, Tracey, daddy, my cousins, more aunts, well not all of my aunts. I am happy to see my family, but someone is missing. I did not see my aunt Denise.

“Daddy where is Nise?” I ask with disappointment.

My dad pauses and says, “Well...you know she wanted to come, but she in the hospital Shemika. Before we left for graduation they rushed her to the emergency room. I just called Jane and she say Nise is in ICU so we on the way to the hospital.”

While my other peers were out celebrating graduation, I spent my graduation night in the ICU waiting room. The doctors had difficulty diagnosing my aunt. She had visitors every day, and I spent the night. We are praying for her recovery, and I am more than confident she is going to recover. My Aunt Denise is a strong woman. She lost her husband a year before, but she always found a way to remain strong for her family.

Today is Tuesday, and Nise has been in the hospital for five days. The only information or diagnosis the doctors are able to provide is pressure on her brain. On our way home from the hospital Tuesday night I sat in the car thinking as

usual. I am thinking about my Aunt Denise. I was anticipating our discussion on the character Queen from Alex Haley's book, "Queen." She read the 2400 page book in two days, and we are going to talk about the main character, Queen. I am anxious to discuss Queen's struggle with her identity and her mother's death. My dad says something that captures my attention, so I pause to listen.

"You know I got this feeling Nise is going to die" My daddy says quietly.

"Why would you say some mess like that for?" My mother replied angrily.

"I don't wanna her to die! I just know she is. Just like I knew my daddy was gonna to die and like I knew Charlie was gonna die." My dad replied defensively.

"How you know she gonna die?" My mom asked curiously.

"Because I saw the funeral in my dream" My dad replied and the conversation ended. He told my mom he had a dream last week, the night of my graduation that my Aunt Denise would die. She died the following day of a brain aneurism. I did not expect Aunt Denise to die, but as usual, I kept my attention on something else instead of grieving. I focused totally on school and my new life. I had to get a dorm room, register for classes, and acquire items for my dorm room.

The day I have waited for finally arrived. I am leaving home to go to college. The day I leave for college, I feel excited, but sad. My mom, dad, Rosalyn, and my younger brothers are driving me to college this Sunday evening. I am leaving everything I know to go and venture into the unknown. My family is here to say their good-byes. In some ways, I guess it is good-bye because I know I am leaving a part of me behind. I believe my family knows this as well.

The trip to college is hilarious. As usual, my dad is lost, and is too proud to ask for directions. He and my mother argue 90% of the trip. My siblings are singing to the radio, and I am doing my favorite activity, thinking. I am thinking about my first day of class, my roommates, my books, etc. I could not believe the past four years of my life have come and gone. The past four years were filled with many great memories, but one feeling that resonates so deeply with me is a feeling of loneliness. I do not know why, but I always feel alone. I always feel like an outsider, not quite fitting in anywhere or with any group. I am praying this feeling of loneliness will depart when I start college.

When we finally arrive at my dorm, it is 11:00 p.m. I was supposed to check in at 5:00 p.m. I explained this to my parents, however, that fell on deaf ears as usual. My parents and siblings take my items out the car. My family has never said goodbye, and in some way I know my family wanted to say we love you, but just didn't know how. My parents insisted on assisting me, but I decided to do this alone. My younger brother Michael was a bit more persistent, so he helped me take my items to my room. I didn't have much, but the little I had I was grateful for it. Once we finished I told my family good-bye, and I ran up the stairs of Clement Hall. I went to my room to unpack, and most importantly, prepare for the rest of my life.

Doo Wop (That Thing)

yo, remember back on the boogie when cats use to harmonize like...
whooh, whooh whooh whooh,
yo, my men and my women,
don't forget about the dean, Sirat al-Mustaqim
yo, its about a thing, uh

If ya feel real good wave your hands in the air
and 'lick' two shots in the atmosphere...
yeah, yeah yeah yeah yeah
yeah, yeah yeah yeah yeah...

It's been three weeks since you've been looking for your friend
The one you let hit it and never called you again
'Member when he told you he was 'bout the Benjamin's
You act like you ain't hear him then gave him a little trim
To begin, how you think you really gon' pretend
Like you wasn't down then you called him again
Plus when you give it up so easy you ain't even foolin' him
If you did it then, then you'd probably fuck again
Talking out your neck sayin' you're a Christian
A Muslim sleeping with the gin
Now that was the sin that did Jezebel in
Who you gon' tell when the repercussions spin
Showing off your ass 'cause you're thinking it's a trend
Girlfriend, let me break it down for you again
You know I only say it 'cause I'm truly genuine
Don't be a hard rock when you really are a gem
Baby girl, respect is just a minimum
Niggas fucked up and you still defending 'em
Now Lauryn is only human

Don't think I haven't been through the same predicament
Let it sit inside your head like a million women in Philly, Penn.
It's silly when girls sell their soul because it's in
Look at where you be in hair weaves like Europeans
Fake nails done by Koreans
Come again
Win win come again, brethren come again, my friend come again, yo come again

Guys you know you better watch out
Some girls, some girls are only about
That thing, that thing, that thing(2x-this line)

The second verse is dedicated to the men
More concerned with his rims and his Tims than his women
Him and his men come in the club like hooligans
Don't care who they offend popping yang like you got yen
Let's not pretend, they wanna pack pistol by they waist men
Crystal by the case men, still in they mother's basement
The pretty face men, claiming that they did a bid men
Need to take care of their three and four kids then
They facing a court case when the child's support late
Money taking, heart breaking now you wonder why women hate men
The sneaky silent men, the punk domestic violence men
The quick to shoot the semen stop acting like boys and be men
How you gon' win when you ain't right within
How you gon' win when you ain't right within
How you gon' win when you ain't right within
Uh uh Come again
Yo yo Come again, brethren come again, sistren come again, come again

Watch out watch out, look out look out,
Watch out watch out, look out look out.

Girls you know you better watch out
Some guys, some guys are only about
That thing, that thing, that thing(2x-this line)

guys you know you better watch out
some girls, some girls are only about
that thing, that thing, that thing(2x-this line) (Hill, 1998, track 5).

Narrative Background: The following narrative will describe the beginning of my journey in fulfilling my dream of completing a degree. Although I was academically prepared, this narrative described how I was not prepared for the lessons on life and love taught outside the classroom

Ahhhh, the sweet taste of freedom! The year is 1998, and I am a freshman in college. I do not know what college has in store for me. Whatever it is, I know it has to be better than my hometown.

Well, I have made it, now what. I got the scholarships, the awards, the recognition, and now everyone is expecting great things from me. I made the decision, well I cannot really say that it is a decision, but my intent is to become a lawyer. Why I want to become a lawyer? Well, I know lawyers earn a lot of money, and I am ready for my reparations. I want money, and a lot of it. I am tired of being broke, busted, and highly disgusted. Nothing about me screams lawyer because I am overly sensitive, I do not have good comebacks, and I care too much. Definitely three characteristics you cannot possess if you want to be a lawyer. Anyway, I have a year to figure out what career path to choose. Therefore, I will take this time to re-invent myself.

What exactly am I re-inventing?

I guess I feel the need to re-invent myself based on my past. I am a girl from a poor family, the only person who has attended college, naïve, a virgin, and full of hope. Nevertheless, I am unsure of myself. I'm unsure when it comes to my past, and I am afraid my past is an obstacle on my path to acquiring the so-

called “American dream”. Therefore, in some ways I feel it is important for me to keep my past where it is, in the past.

I head out the door to my Honors Composition I class in Peck Hall. As I make the hike across the campus, I notice very quickly that college is very different from my hometown. Everyone is wearing designer clothes, and it’s the norm. Heading up the stairs to Room 201 I arrive ten minutes early nervously waiting to embark on this new learning experience. As my peers stroll in the room, I notice very quickly I am the only African-American in the class. Doodling on my folder, I could not help but to hear the conversations around me. Trips to Europe this past summer, summer enrollment in college courses, and family visits planned for the upcoming weekend reminded me of how I was so different from my peers. This past summer I worked to save a deposit for my on-campus housing and to purchase items for my dorm room. Yesterday, I realized that I would spend over \$500.00 for books another unexpected expense.

The instructor’s resounding voice brought me back to reality. As I sat in class, many thoughts ran through my mind. Why am I here? In comparison to my other peers, am I intelligent? As the class concluded, I was the first to exit the classroom. Although I was supposed to go work out I walked to the James Union Building. Walking through the doors of the Scheduling Center, I retrieved the necessary forms and began to weigh my options. I enrolled in honors courses throughout high school and was very successful. I loved the challenge and enjoyed the experience. On the other hand, I am in a new environment. One where there were so many unknowns and the fear of failure scares me. I submit

the necessary forms to the receptionist, and walk to my next class. I withdrew from Honors Composition I and enrolled in Composition I.

Living in a residence hall or dormitory is an experience of its own. I live in a dorm with two white females. My roommates are nice, and they are preparing for sorority rush. I met another young woman in dormitory name Alisa. Alisa, is a black girl from a small hometown like me, but a couple of years older. A room became available so we decide to become roommates. She is very sweet; loves to sing, but we have one problem. She will not clean. I came from a home where I cleaned, and refused to live in filth. Many days I cleaned our apartment, as she sat on the couch reading a book.

Alisa and I hang out a lot. I want to become more active on campus; although, Alisa is totally content with relaxing in our cozy apartment. My daily routine consists of class and working out. I'm really familiar with the party scene since Alisa doesn't like to party. I have met a couple of my classmates outside of class, but I don't consider any of those individuals as friends. I'm really missing home right now. I like my school, but there so many people here that I feel like another number. I feel useless and I feel alone.

Before I left for college, Marshall, my best friend, predicted I would lose my virginity my first year of college like the people we saw on television. Of course, I totally disagree with Marshall. During my freshman year of high school, I made the decision to remain a virgin until I marry. My virginity is under lock and key, although I had been in those situations. The situations when the guy expected to "seal the deal". Yet, I always say no. It's kind of funny, maybe ironic

that I have this belief because its not like my parents had this expectation for me. My parents did not discuss sex with me, or any matter relating to sex or reproduction. Anything dealing with sex I had to learn on my own. My mother never purchased bras for me I did that for myself. When I got my menstrual cycle, I figured that process out on my own. The process of a woman getting pregnant learned that on my own as well. I could only assume my parents assumed I knew these golden nuggets of information. Well, I did not know about sex. After the sexual abuse, I became more afraid of sex. Besides, I would not allow a man to use me for sex, and then discard me after he is finished. You see I may have low self-esteem, but I still have values. I am not going to have sex until I am married. At least my husband would understand my inhibition in the bedroom.

I'm meeting a lot of guys, and I am beginning to perceive that most of these friendships are not serious because I am not sexually active or because I am not mentally into them. However, I met this guy name Ryan at the beginning of the fall semester. Ryan is an upperclassman and he is a nice guy. We talk on the phone and we go out. One Friday night in October, he calls and invites me to his room to watch a movie. I am bored. There is nothing else to do so I say yes. As I walk to his car, I have an inkling I am not coming home until the next morning.

"So what do you want to watch" Ryan asked as his browsed through his movie collection.

"I don't know whatever you want to watch." I didn't care. I was just nervous because this was my first time alone in an upperclassman's room.

"Well, I have Devil's Advocate. Do you want to watch this?"

"Sure I haven't seen it before."

So we sat on his bed and watched the movie. In case you didn't know there isn't any furniture in a dorm room, except for a bed. In any case, it was cold, so we decided to get under the covers. Ryan placed his arms around my shoulder. All right little buddy, don't get any ideas! The movie was pretty interesting, but Ryan and I talked most of the time. Out of nowhere, Ryan kisses me on my lips. The kiss stirs something within me because we kiss again. The next thing I know the inevitable occurs.

"Do you want to have sex?" Ryan whispers.

"Sex?" I ask like it was the first time I heard the word.

"Yeah... do you want to do it?" He whispers.

"Do what....?" I ask curiously.

"You not a virgin are you?" He asks suspiciously.

Man why guys always ask me this question. I mean didn't he see the word virgin branded on my forehead, literally. I mean he had to have known I was a virgin because I was nervous and I didn't have any experience kissing or anything else he had in mind. Therefore, I answered the question he already had the answer to.

"Yeah...I'm a virgin." I whispered.

"Okay, well I promise to take it slow." Ryan whispered while he tried to put his hand under my shirt.

I brushed his hand away and said. "No... I think we should stop."

I liked Ryan and everything, but I valued my virginity. He wasn't my boyfriend, and he had no formal commitment to me. Ryan got a bit frustrated

and rolled over. I think he's okay with us not having sex, but from his reaction I know he's upset.

As I predicted he brought me home the next morning, hymen still intact. In any case, I thought things were fine until the calls decreased, the visits stopped, and suddenly he disappeared. I began to realize he's no longer interested, since I would not have sex with him. At first, my feelings were hurt, but I got over it quickly. I'm happy I saw through his game.

However, one guy captured my attention. This guy is cute, nice body, and he had an air of mystery. Many people viewed him as arrogant, but I viewed him as confident. I am attracted to a man who is confident, or at least appears to be confident. Confidence in my eyes exudes security. His name is Mark.

I remember the first day we formally met. We have class together, but we never talk. I wonder if he ever sees me watching him. In class, I do not say much, but every time he talks, I look up. He is always sitting next to this pretty girl, so I guess he has a girlfriend. One morning I am walking behind him to class, and he shuts the door in my face. I thought it was rude, but it is a possibility he did not see me. After this occasion, I had conflicting thoughts towards him. One minute I thought he was a rude, arrogant jerk. However, when I saw him smile, it put my heart at ease. I cannot really explain it. I mean how can someone put your heart at ease, and you do not know him or her and they have not shown you any type of attention. I do not know how it is possible, but it happens. Sometime in late October, I was sitting at a table in the dining hall with one of my classmates discussing a term paper for our University Studies course.

“So what are you going to write your paper on” my classmate asks me.

“I don’t know. I guess I better get on it pretty soon.” I respond confidently.

“Yeah you need to get on it soon.” Mark jumps in with a huge smile as he pulls out the chair to sit beside me.

Now I will remind you my classmate and me were having a conversation. Not my classmate, Mark, and I. Out of nowhere, this dude jumps in. Of course, I am like, who are you to interrupt my conversation? You know I did not get an attitude, I just smile at him. Actually, I am glad. I’ve seen him around campus, but I am too shy to approach him. I didn’t think he would find interest in someone like me.

“So I don’t think we formally met. Your name..? He asks while licking his lips. Does he think he’s LL Cool J?

“I’m Shemika” I reply with a smile. While am I smiling?

“And your name?” I ask while looking him right in the eye.

“Mark” he proclaims with excitement. What year are you? I haven’t seen you around?” Wow, I am in your University Studies class and he has never noticed me. He did not have to tell me his name because I knew him.

“Ummm I’m a freshman. Actually we take University Studies together,” I mention casually.

“For real? I’ve never seen you in class.” He says as if he’s puzzled. Wow, another shot to my ego. Well this can’t get any worse.

“Although I’ve never seen you in class before, I’m sure after today I won’t miss your face. You look very nice today.” He says sincerely.

“Thank you, I will take the compliment.” and I laugh. We continue to talk until the dining hall prepares to close.

“So where do you live?” He asks curiously.

“I live in the apartments.” I say while disposing the trash on my tray.

“That’s across campus,” he responds with a worried look on his face.

“Yeah, I know. I’m used to walking by myself it’s not a problem.” I state confidently.

“But it’s dark. You really shouldn’t be walking late at night by yourself.” He mentions as if I did not know.

“Yeah... I know but I’ll be okay,” I say to reassure him that I was independent.

“Well, do you want me to walk you home? I don’t mind.” He inquires with a smile.

“Ummmmm.. .I’ll let you walk me home this one-time” I reply and laugh.

“Okay...well thank you for allowing me to walk you home.” Mark replies as we exit the JUB.

Mark and I spend a lot of time together. Sometimes we watch videos or just talk. We often play this game called video. Video is a reenactment of one of our favorite videos. I loved when he did the LL Cool J video “I Need Love.” This was his favorite LL Cool J song, but I am sure he would not tell his boys that. We always disagree about something, and Mark always has to prove his view is right. Do not bring up Tupac and Biggie. Oh my goodness, this argument would last for at least five hours. I was not a hip-hop connoisseur like Mark, but he had all the reasons why Biggie was better than Tupac. I thought Tupac was better because of Poetic Justice, Jada Pinkett was in his video, and I liked the beat of his song *I*

Ain't Mad At You. Mark wanted to be an attorney so I guess he was practicing his argument skills with me. The arguments always ended with his point being the correct one, and everyone else was crazy.

I remember seeing him at a party before Thanksgiving Break. He wanted to dance with me, and we had our first dance to Bell Biv Devoe's "*When Will I See You Smile Again*." I always have fun with him because I feel I can be myself. For the rest of the semester we have one thing in common, good conversation. I never met a man so intellectually and socially aware, masculine, and charming. We continue to have talks about *The Mis-Education of Lauryn Hill*, the women's suffrage movement, short stories by Edgar Allan Poe, any topic you could name there would be a great conversation to follow.

I think Mark is interested in me, but I am still infatuated with Ryan. Mark and I talk, but I never display any romantic interest. Until one morning, a friend needed a ride to work. Of course, having a car is a luxury for a college freshman. The individuals I usually call are out of town or busy with their own personal matters. I know Mark has a car, so I call him.

"Good morning" I say with my cheerful tone.

"Good morning... oh hey" Mark answers as though he is surprised.

"You sound shocked."

"I am" He replies.

"Why"

"Because I haven't spoken with you in a minute. Anyway, what's up" He asks anxiously.

I put on my whiny high-pitched voice. "Ummmm I have a favor to ask?"

“What’s up” He asks curiously.

“Well, my friend Zalika needs a ride to work and she doesn’t have a car. I wouldn’t call you unless this was important, but do you mind taking her to work. Please?”

“Ummm.” He makes a heavy sigh.

“Please”

I already knew what Mark was thinking. Mark didn’t like Zalika and Zalika didn’t like Mark. They both fed each other with long handled spoons. Zalika thought Mark was obnoxious, arrogant, and aggressive. Mark thought Zalika was an idiot that lacked the mental capacity to put two logical thoughts together. In any case, they are both my friends.

“Please Mark. I wouldn’t ask this any other time.” I plead.

“Man...okay I will take her to work.” He replies grudgingly.

Mark pulls up in front of Zalika’s dorm. As we walk down the steps, Zalika starts mumbling under her breath.

“Ohhhh I don’t wanna ride in his car.” With her nose turned up.

“Look Zee he’s taking you to work. None of your friends would take you. I know you don’t like him, but he doesn’t have to take you to work.” I respond with frustration.

“Whatever... I still don’t like him.” Zalika mumbles under her breath.

I just have one phrase to say...Black people! How you gonna, and yes I mean how you gonna.. how you gonna act siddity when you riding in someone else’s car. You don’t have a car and none of your friends are willing to take you to work? I tell you.

“Look Zee don’t be acting siddity when you get in his car.” As we approach the car, Mark looked in our direction and rolled his eyes. I know he’s rolling his eyes because of Zalika. If he only knew, the feeling was so mutual.

“Hey Mark” greeting him cheerfully as I got in the front seat.

“What’s up” he responds in his deep voice. Zalika got in the back seat and buckled her seat belt. I know this siddity chic is going to speak.

“Good morning Mark” Zalika begrudgingly remarks with her fake smile.

“Hey” he replies. Mark and I make small talk, and Zalika does not say a word. We drop her off at work and she says thank you. Mark takes me back to my apartment.

“Thank you for taking Zalika to work” I said with a smile.

“Not a problem. What you doing tonight?”

“Ummm... I don’t have any plans” I respond

“Wanna watch a movie,” he asks

“Sure... I will call you later.” I respond with a sweet smile.

Mark looks at me as though he’s not convinced, “Are you gonna to call me for real?” he asks doubtfully.

“I promise we will watch a movie tonight. I will call you later.” I shut the door and walk to my room. I knew I wasn’t going to watch a movie with Mark, but I had every intention of calling Ryan.

The fall semester is ending, and so is this infatuation with Ryan. Funny that I feel rejected by Ryan when in essence I saved myself from someone who really didn’t have good intentions towards me. I work in the university library

and Mark comes by often to visit. We setup secret meetings in the book stacks to talk about school, life, and family. Mark is very interesting to me, and I want to see the path our friendship will take. We are preparing to close for the Christmas break and I want to remain in touch with Mark. However, I do not have his home number. I know he checked out books from the library, so we obviously have a record of him. I look up his records and find his home number. Maybe I will give him a call.

I went home for the Christmas break, and I thought about Mark a lot. He is such a great person, and I am tired of playing hard to get. So, I decide to call him. I finally get up the nerve to dial the numbers. The phone starts to ring. As the phone rings, I pray he picks up. On the third ring, someone picks up the phone.

“Hello” a male voice answers.

“Can I speak to Mark?” I whisper.

“This is Mark, who is this” He replies in curious tone“

Who do you want it to be” I reply. I picked up this bad habit up from Marshall. I hated when he called my house and said that.

‘I want it to be...I don’t know who I want it to be. For real, who is this?’ He states angrily.

“It is Shemika” I said laughing. He is shocked to hear from me. Shocked to hear I had his number and more shocked I called him. We talk for two hours that night. Every day during the Christmas break we talk. Now I am anxious to get back to school because I cannot wait to see him. I am truly enamored with this guy, and we are only friends.

The night before classes start, I visit him. As usual, I know we will probably talk, talk, and talk. I love talking to him, and seeing him smile. It is getting late, and later, and eventually I am lying in his bed. The lights began to dim from a bright white to a soft blue light and the smooth sound of R Kelly is playing in the background. The mood is beginning to change, and I welcome it. Lying here, we began to talk more and more.

“You can lay your head on my pillow” Mark whispers.

“Okay” I nervously reply as if it was no big deal.

“So tell me Shemika what you think about love” Mark whispers.

“What do I think about love? I don’t know Mark. Well... I do know.”

Unable to control my blushing.

“What is it that you know?” he asks while staring into my eyes.

I look him in the eyes and say, “I think love...I think love is loving someone no matter what you know. Loving them during the good times and the bad times. I think love is acceptance.”

“Really” he says and smiles”

“Yeah really” and I playfully hit him in his chest. I tried to hit him again, but instead of hitting his chest he kissed me on the forehead. I slowly caressed his face, and then he kissed me. This is my first time experiencing a kiss like his. The kiss is slow, gentle, and so passionate. The talking leads to kissing, and then to that final moment that all guys, well some guys wait for. Is she going to do it?

Well, I have no problem saying no to temptation. However, this time this is different. I am feeling things I have never felt before. I feel safe, I feel sexy, I feel happy, and although we have not said those famous three words, I felt my

being there implied it. My presence and my actions spoke the feelings flowing in my heart.

“Are you okay” Mark whispers.

“Yeah I’m okay. I say reassuringly.

I whisper slowly, “Mark....” .

“Yeah” he whispers with concern.

“I’m a virgin. I don’t know anything and I haven’t experienced a feeling like this before.” There it is. I finally said it. No need to beat around the bush, I am going to be vulnerable.

“It’s okay. Mark says with a smile. You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do Shemika. I’m not trying to have sex with you. If you want to wait we can, it’s okay.” He says while holding me in his arms.

So this time, it just feels right. Unlike before, I would have said no. I was afraid of the wrath of God, but right now, I am not thinking about church, God, or the rapture. I feel Mark is the person I am supposed to be with, sexually although, in my mind I knew this was not sex.

Tonight is a night I will never forget. Tonight I handed over not just my virginity, but also my heart. I guess it did not occur to me until two days later that I was no longer a virgin. It occurred to me because I was feeling the physical pain of that night, and I knew God was punishing me. I hadn’t heard from Mark in two days so I immediately sought Mark’s attention. I was new to this whole sex thing. My concept of sex is based on the relationships I saw growing up, what I was taught about sex, and my own projections of how I saw myself and others. Although no one was holding any sex education classes, the only people I knew

having sex in my family were grown people. Grown people were married. Not to say that they weren't having sex before marriage, but marriage was always the next logical step. You can't have one without the other. Even in all of my family dysfunction most of the couples in my family were married. Even with the couples in my family who were not married, they still cared about each other. I mean you don't have sex with people unless you care about them right? Where I was from even the girls who were having sex were having sex with guys they dated or cared about. Girls having sex just for fun are loose, and there are other colorful terms used to describe them.

Even in the movies the people who have sex love each other or they care about each other. Like in *Love Jones* Nina has sex with Darius although they aren't in a relationship, but they care about each other. Oh I can't forget Savannah from *Waiting to Exhale*. She had sex with her ex-boyfriend, Kenneth, wait that's not a good example because Kenneth was married. Okay so I have a fifty-fifty chance here. I'm going to hope for the best because like Nina I was a good girl. Good girls are not out having sex with some anybody.

Good girls are nice, pretty, smart, giving, patient, and most of all, good girls kept their legs closed. We are taught to keep our legs closed in church and that sentiment held true outside the church doors as well. Good girls are the girls that become the girlfriend and later the wife because they always did things the right way. That's the way it always happens in the movies and real life.

Hmm...maybe Savannah could have been Kenneth's wife if she had been more ...I'm not sure. Savannah was smart, pretty, a great friend, so I'm not sure why Kenneth didn't marry her. She was a good girl, I guess somewhere along the way

she did something wrong. Good girls don't get pregnant before they graduate from high school and college. I learned that in high school. Girls who were having sex or who were pregnant were not elected to Homecoming Court, not selected for the cheerleading squad, or selected for class president. They were also not selected for other distinguished honors. It was always the same group of girls who were on Homecoming Court, class officers, cheerleading squad, or class favorites and I was in that group. I'm a good girl or least I'm trying hard to be a good girl.

I assume that since Mark and I are having sex we are together. I assume he does not have a girlfriend, and I assume he obviously cares about me. I mean I know he's a man but men don't go around having sex with just some anybody either right? I mean that's what separates the good guys from the bad guys. Good guys care about women and value women. Good guys don't have babies sprawled everywhere because they believe in the value of marriage. Good guys don't beat women and they don't rape women. Good guys are smart, giving, and hardworking. I'm a good girl and Mark's a good guy. He has to be a good guy because if he isn't that would mean I wasn't a good girl. Good girls would never allow someone to use them or disrespect them. That's what made good girls smart because they could smell danger a mile away.

Besides Mark and I spend a lot of time together. Well, it's usually during the hours of 10:00 p.m.-8:00 a.m. I mean this is normal because we are both busy college students. I know Mark would spend time with me on the weekends if he could but he has to go home over the weekend, he has to work, or he has a track meet. However, one day my friend asked the question, "Why don't you two go out or why do you only see each other late at night?" Suddenly, the light bulb

finally came on in my head! Why are we only seeing each other late at night? Why are we not going out? When I address these questions, Mark says I am putting too much pressure on him or I'm trying to use some other form of manipulation. Although my questions are very valid, and I knew he was deflecting, by the end of conversation I was the one apologizing.

It's obvious that I'm pretty clueless regarding men. However, I do have something and that is my intuition. Although I could not really place my finger on it, I know something is wrong with this situation. In my heart of hearts, I know Mark is hiding something and there is a hint of deception. Therefore, I ask a friend who knows a friend about Mark. People say women gossip, but please believe me; men are just as willing to give information as women are! Sure enough, I found a hater, and he told me Mark has a girlfriend. I call Mark and ask about his girlfriend. He denies having a girlfriend, but I know something is wrong. I get the girl's number, call her, and to my luck, she did not pick up the phone.

As I sat in my room that night, I am fuming with anger. I am not sure if my feelings stem from anger or hurt. I am confused because I thought Mark and I were something serious. Although we have not said these words, I know I care about him. I am beginning to realize I am being played. He played me for sex, and all this time he had a girlfriend. He is not telling me he cares because he is telling his girlfriend. As a tear rolled down my face, the phone began to ring. My roommate looked at me, and somehow I know this call was for me. I pick up the phone.

“Hello”

“Did someone call Natasha?”

“Yeah, I called Natasha” I respond anxiously.

“Who is this?” Natasha replies with annoyance.

“Umm my name is Shemika. You do not know me and I do not know you.

However, we have something in common, well someone. That someone is Mark.”

I answer nervously.

“What about Mark.” She replies sarcastically.

“Well I heard Mark is your boyfriend.”

“Yeah, he is my boyfriend.” She replies with an attitude.

“Well, your boyfriend is having sex with me!” I respond angrily. Out of nowhere, I hear this shout....

“That is a lie.... I do not know you....I don't even know your name”

I do not know you. I do not even know your name. The phrase rings through my mind and immediately I recognize the voice. It is Mark. Now he does not know me. I am not calling her to argue with her, but to hear from her that yes they are together. Mark says he does not know me, denies we have anything going on, and denies having sex. Hearing those words crush me and my heart is broken. How did I go from being so smart, so beautiful, so driven, and now you do not know me. You do not know my name! Last night I was your baby, but now I am a figment of your imagination. I zone out. The only thing I can think about is the sad mistake of giving this guy my virginity, my heart, and now he does not know me. How could he be so cruel? The argument continues and eventually one of us hangs up the phone.

I am hurt, but at that moment, this self-righteous indignation rises within me! I could not believe he used me. I believe this is wrong; no, I know this is wrong. You do not take advantage of people's kindness, and you know what... he has to pay! I have to make sure that he understands you cannot play with my emotions, and get away with it. After I finish crying, I conceive numerous ways to seek revenge on him. I call a local pizzeria, order 25 pizzas, and had them delivered to his room. My roommate almost convinced me to flatten his tires, and put sugar in his tank. I am bold, but I am not that bold.

Mark on the other hand manages to convince his peers in his residence hall that I am crazy! He told his friends I am psycho and they should not talk to me. I am friends with some of these people, but suddenly they stop speaking to me. Within the next week it finally hits me that things are over with Mark. I feel so hurt, and most of all stupid. How could I allow someone to get that close, so soon, give him my heart and he had done nothing to earn it? I guess I did it because I am looking for love. When you are looking for something, you are vulnerable, and when you are vulnerable, you are not stable. When you are vulnerable and insecure, it is very easy for people to spot your weaknesses. Mark knew he had to use a certain technique to get me. Giving the perception he was sensitive and caring was the way to my head. Once someone is in your head, you are more than willing to give them your heart. Once someone has your heart, you give that individual your total devotion. Once a person has your devotion, they have your undying love. I cannot believe that a night of sex led me down a path of loneliness and regret. What night? What kiss?

I forgot.

Mark does not know my name.

Sweet Lady

Sweet lady would you be my sweet love for a lifetime
I'll be there when you need me just call and receive me

Now any other day I would play it cool
But I can't now cause I want you
See I'm hooked on how you flex your style
and I wanna talk for a little while
I never really seen your type but I must admit that I kinda like
so maybe if you have the time we could talk about you being my

Sweet lady would you be my sweet love for a lifetime
I'll be there when you need me just call and receive me

Now on the regular I would waste time but I don't want to
cuz you're so damn fine and I heard that you were taken
but that don't have to stop you from makin
late night phone calls on the telephone about your fantasies and ways to get it on
when you need me I will be there for you my sweet lady

Sweet lady would you be my sweet love for a lifetime
I'll be there when you need me just call and receive me

Say you will be baby say you will be my lady
I've got to have all your love so I wont even front
just say you'll give it to me don't wanna hear the maybe's
and I will give you all my heart if you say you'll be my baby
(Gibson, 1998, track 4)

Narrative Background: Struggling to maintain my value system and understand the consequences of sex are illustrated in the narrative, Sweet Lady (Gibson, 1998, track 4). The song for this narrative represents the romanticizing of my courtship and reconciliation with an individual who had betrayed my trust.

Where do broken hearts go?

They do not go home that is for sure! My home is with someone who is moving on with his life, and I am nowhere in it. When things did not go my way, and they usually did not, I knew how to function as though things were okay. To my luck, I have the lovely pleasure of seeing Mark around campus, every day! I give him the most evil looks, and I know I intimidate him. I feel so much contempt towards him. I spend a great deal of time mulling over the events in my head continuously. Needless to say Valentine's Day sucked that year.

At this time, I have a new roommate, and new friends. Slowly but surely my friends are taking the place of my family. My relationship with my family is changing, and my visits home begin to decrease. My friends are there when the Mark fiasco came to a crashing end, and so I leaned on them for support. My friends tried on many occasions to cheer me up and I dated other people. Although I am dating other people, I am not happy. I'm not comparing the guys to Mark, but my heart is not happy.

Kim's holding a bottle of my Victoria Secret spray like it's her mike and starts singing "All I really wanted was some of your time, instead you told me lies when someone else was on your mind what you do to me"

Kim throws Kristie another bottle of Victoria Secret body spray and Kristie joins in “What you do to me”.

The ladies begin singing in unison and although I hated this song at the time, it was my life. A tear rolls down my cheek and Kim stops singing.

Kim sits on the edge of my bed and looks me in the eyes and says, “Darling, you have to stop this sadness.”

“What” I ask as though I’m shocked.

Kristie laughs and says, “You’re doing it again.”

Kim cocks her head to the side and says, “I know just what you need.” Her eyes light up and I’m almost afraid to ask about her bright idea.

“See what you need to do Shemika is have sex with someone else.”

I look at Kim like she is crazy and I respond, “Are you serious? I mean sex got me into this mess. Now you’re suggesting I should I have more sex? I’m sorry Kim but that’s a bit ridiculous.”

Kristie screams from the quad bathroom, “Oh my goodness why didn’t I think of that. It makes perfect sense. Good job Kim.”

Kim rises from my bed and walks to the mirror to admire her frame. She turns confidently and asserts “I mean Shemika, once you have sex with someone else you will forget about Mark. You’re only hung up on Mark because he’s your first. Once you have sex with someone else you will forget all about Mark.”

I value my friends’ insights, but I couldn’t wrap my mind around that. I mean, how do you just have sex with someone and you don’t care about them. Sex is supposed to be special and shared with someone you care about.

As these thoughts are running through my mind I ask Kim, “So wouldn’t I be forming another connection with another person who doesn’t care about me. I mean I thought sex, no I believe sex is special.”

Kristie appears out of the bathroom and sighs, “Oh Shemika you and your love stories. Sex is not about love. Sex is just sex and you should have sex with multiple people to see how you like it. Men do it all the time Shemika. Mark is having sex with everyone and here you are sitting in this room being a one man woman. I agree with Kim once you have sex with someone else you will forget all about Mark. Kristie looks at me directly and asks, I mean what are your other options”?

I didn’t have a rebuttal so I sat there and continued to entertain the conversation. As I listened, my friends provided poignant points regarding my behavior over the past month. I had lost weight, I wasn’t eating, I was sleeping more, and I just seem sad. Hell I was sad. My friends recognized the sad fact that I placed my life on hold because of this event. I considered their suggestions, and at this point, I was willing to do anything to break out of this funk.

So, I decided to have sex with the person I was dating. His name was Josh and he was a nice person. I knew I did not care about him the way I cared about Mark. Honestly, I wasn’t really interested in him. However, Josh is interested in me and we are going to have sex. I went to visit him in his residence hall, and I knew what I wanted to happen, at least this was what I thought I wanted. While we were kissing, my small voice began to tell me this is not right. Having sex with another person is sure to bring another unhealthy connection and more drama into my life. Yes, I would have no attachment to Mark, but I would become

attached to this person now. I think this voice is God so I left Josh's room. I know I'm hurt, but I cannot give myself to another man sexually again only to hurt even more.

In the back of my mind I will admit, I miss Mark. Although he hurt my pride, my heart, and me, I care about him. Examining my past relationship with Mark, it is obvious to me there is some dysfunction. However, my life is full of dysfunction. Dysfunction to most people is normal to me. In my family women are verbally abused, physically abused, and sexually abused. Mark did not hit me and he did not sexually abuse me, so in my book he's still one of the good guys. Yes, Mark had sex with me and another woman, but in my eyes, even this dysfunction is normal.

In the earlier part of my parents' marriage my father cheated on my mom with various women, one lady happen to be her best friend. To make the wound deeper before I left for college I found out that my dad cheated on my mom during the time I was in high school. My mom knew but she never said anything about it to us. I guess this explains her change in behavior during this time. I was there the nights my mom cried. I saw her starving herself because she thought her weight gain led to my father's infidelity. I was there the nights my mom would drink and drink and drink because her heart was broken. I knew this hurt my mom, but she always found somewhere in her heart to forgive this man. My mother's willingness to give second chances was a trait I picked up from her. Yes, I know Mark is wrong, but people make mistakes right? I did not intend to pursue him, but I will admit I missed him.

Mark frequents the library often, so I see him at work. When Mark comes in, as usual, he gets the evil eye. I had developed a technique of looking at him so he knew how much I despised him. One day in the beginning of March, I saw him walking through the door. I immediately place the book in my face and pretend to be busy. I hear someone approaching my desk, and I hear a voice. It's Mark.

“Hello” he whispers quietly

I did not say anything. Surely, he's not talking to me. I know he is not talking to me.

“Do you mind if we talk?” he asks

I look into Mark's eyes, and I tell him no, and continue to read my book. I ignored him until he walked away.

I thought to myself, he has some nerve. I cannot believe this guy would even approach me. I mean he has already made me look like a fool-did he really make me look like the fool- he told our peers I was crazy, and now he wanted to talk. What could we possibly have to talk about at this point? This scenario occurred every time he came to the library. Eventually I gave in. I agreed to talk with him.

We talked. We talked a couple of times. I vented, he apologized, I vented again, and he apologized even more. Mark told me he felt bad about what he did. He admitted to everything. He admitted to calling me crazy, lying about not knowing me, the girlfriend, everything. I'm used to people saying things they think you want to hear, but mostly, I'm used to people not apologizing to me at all. Yet, as I gazed into his eyes I knew he was sorry. I could see the sincerity or maybe I needed to believe he was sincere. At that time, Mark was not looking or

seeking my forgiveness because he wanted to be in a relationship with me. He was looking for my forgiveness to clear his conscious because he knew he was wrong. Mark told me that before this situation he had never really considered how his actions had impacted another person. He was always looking out for self, and never really had to think about others. He was ashamed of his actions, and wanted to apologize for inflicting hurt on another individual. Who was I to judge him or hold a grudge? The only thing I could do or choose to do was trust that he was sorry and move on. Besides, he's the first person that ever apologized to me for hurting me.

Eventually we started talking again on a casual basis. There was no sex; we just picked up where our friendship left off. Mark walks me home from work and sometimes we study together. He introduced me to a Chinese restaurant in our town and we frequent this place often. Some nights we pick up a white chocolate mocha-my favorite coffee-at the campus cyber-café and we take long walks around the campus just talking. We talk about our dreams, life, we can discuss anything. Spring Break was in late March, which left about another month before we were out on summer break. I decide not to go home, so I stay on campus. Mark had plans to visit his Grandma during Spring Break, and we talk every night. One night my phone rang and I hoped it was him.

“Hello” I say excitedly

“What's up?” Mark replies

“Nothing just sitting here thinking about you. How is your trip?”

“Oh my trip is going okay. You know my grandma lives in the country so there isn't much going on here.”

“When are you coming back?” I ask anxiously.

“Ummm I might be coming back tomorrow.” Mark responds hesitantly

“Oh...wait, someone is knocking at my door.” I reply curiously. Who could possibly be knocking at my door? I didn’t order any food and the campus is completely empty. All of my friends are gone, so I’m truly puzzled. I turn the lock and open the door.

“I decided to come back tonight.” Mark says with a big smile.

I immediately run into his arms. I am so happy to see him, and I’m so happy to have some company.

“I had to come back tonight because I missed you. I have a surprise for you.”

He handed me a beautiful friendship card and a bouquet of roses. Mark had truly made my night, and I gave him a kiss on the cheek. During this time, I saw another side of Mark. He opened up his heart to me and revealed some of the issues he was dealing with. Mark’s real father was absent from his life and he had a strained relationship with his stepfather. A stepfather who he viewed as his father; although, his mother and stepfather were divorced because of his stepfather’s infidelity. Mark shared how his stepfather paid him to maintain his secret and the distress his mother suffered during the marriage. Mark’s mom eventually remarried, but from our conversations he seemed really protective of his mother. I knew he was holding some things back, but for the most part his family was normal in comparison to my own.

Living a normal life and having stability was something I wanted so desperately for my future. Mark’s family supported each other, celebrated every

family milestone together, they were successful, and had a foundation of love. Apart of me was very scared to open up my heart to him. I knew where I came from, and I knew I wanted more for my life. Therefore, I took the dreadful step and shared my past with him. I told him about my family and the abuse. He was empathetic and caring. He wasn't judgmental and it didn't change the nature of our friendship.

After Mark left that evening I thought about our conversation. Talking about the abuse with Mark brought up old emotions. I can't say it was just that conversation because last month Tracey confided in me that she was sexually abused as well. Although we were abused by the same person, her abuse was more extensive. Like me she never disclosed her abuse to anyone because we were both afraid of our abuser, and besides who would believe us anyway?

Crazy Over You

I fell in love with you, twas' like a dream come true,
and my love for you will never end, oh no.
It was such a special night.
You lay right by my side, and I told you things I'd never tell a soul.
And now that I have you baby babe.
I promise I'll never leave (never leave).
Cause' you're the only one that makes my life complete.
And I'm...
crazy over you, I don't know what to do,
I'm crazy over you,
yeah oohh...
And I'm crazy over you,
I don't know what to do,
I'm crazy over you...
ohh girl...
A love that never ends.
You're more than just a friend, and my heart n soul, I'll always give to you.
The only in my life.
Someday you'll be my wife, and I'll be with you until the end of time.
And now that I have you baby babe.
I promise I'll never leave, (never leave)
cause' you're the only one, that makes my life complete.
(112, 1998, track 13)

Narrative Background: The following narrative describes my evolving relationship with Mark. In addition, this narrative succinctly depicts the transition I was making in creating emotional distance from my family.

Love was definitely in the air. I have fallen deeply in love with this man. We are an item, and I feel in my heart Mark is my soul mate. My roommate and friends do not like Mark. They question Mark's real interest towards me. Honestly, my friends were there for me the past few months. My friends were there when he proclaimed he did not know me. My friends were there when he told people I was crazy. My friends saw the tears I cried because I felt used. Yes, they were there, but Mark is here now. He had made everything right in my eyes. I am head over hills in love with Mark, so I cannot understand my friends concerns about Mark. Eventually I begin to disconnect from them.

I am in love, and I have never felt a feeling like this before. We spend every waking moment together, well we are in college so that's easy. Our relationship is official, and that means we are having sex. We always practice safe sex, but one night the condom broke. I am scared to say the least. I immediately assume the worst. What if I am pregnant? What will I do? Mark tries to console me, but my future is at stake. The next day I take a pregnancy test, and it came back negative. Clearly, I'm ignorant regarding the fact that a pregnancy test cannot determine any result the morning after. So I learn that I have to wait until I miss a

menstrual cycle and the pregnancy hormone is present in my bloodstream before a pregnancy was detected. Anyway, the test is negative, so I go on my merry way.

The spring semester ended and it is time for me to go back home. I am excited to go home. Nonetheless, I am very sad because Mark and I are separating. My last day at school is difficult because I know I am going to miss Mark. Mark lives in Nashville so he is a two-hour drive from my hometown. The last day of school Mark came over to help me pack, we said our good-byes, and as usual, he had a surprise. He gave me a teddy bear, and told me to hold this teddy bear every time I felt lonely. We made plans for our next visit together, and we said good-bye.

Arriving home after my first year from college is very interesting. I do not know why college students do this, but my first summer I thought I knew everything! I am learning new philosophies, ideas, theories, and learning how to think for myself. If I could find a way to rationalize my idea and present you with a logical argument I had won the battle in my mind. I knew my first battle would occur over my new relationship.

My family is excited to see me, and the first thing they comment on is my weight. My mom tells me my behind is getting bigger. I was never lacking in that department, but I have to admit it is getting bigger. I am also tired, a lot. If I am in the car, movies, or anywhere give me an idle five minutes and I am sure to fall asleep. For the first week, I slept every day, sometimes all day. My breasts are sore all the time as well. One day I was in the car with Tracey. We were talking, and I immediately went to sleep. My sister had noticed my pattern over the past weeks. She asked if I was pregnant. I told her of course not.

However, as soon as I got back home I thought about it. The night Mark and I had sex and the condom broke, my menstrual cycle had only ended two days earlier. Now it's seven weeks later, and my menstrual cycle is late. How could I forget my cycle is late! It was actually three weeks late. I began to realize I could be pregnant. Missing a cycle was not an abnormality for me. I've missed my cycle in the past due to extreme exercise, stress, or not eating so I was not alarmed. However, this time it's different. I'm tired all the time, my breasts are aching and bigger, and I am eating. I had actually gained 10 pounds in a month.

The thoughts ran continuously in my mind. I could be pregnant. I had to know. I had to purchase a pregnancy test, but how. I did not have any money so I could not purchase a test. How was I going to purchase the test? I did not have a car and if I went to the store, I would have to go with one of my family members so they would know. I start to panic, and I did not know what to do. The thoughts ran through my mind repeatedly. If I am pregnant, what would this mean? If I am pregnant, this would end life. I am in school for a year, and here I am knocked up. My parents had never met Mark, and I did not want them to meet under these circumstances.

What would Mark do if I am pregnant? I know he has every intention of going to law school, and this would be such a hindrance for him. Mark is living the dream of family members who were not afforded the same opportunity he was afforded. There was a great deal of pressure on him to be a success, and having a baby was not in the plan. I did not want his family to think I was trying to trap him. What would I do? I could not go to school and be pregnant. What would people say? My parents and siblings will be so disappointed, but some of

my other family members will be a bit overjoyed. I do not want to disappoint my family, or be a horrible example for other young women in my family. I prayed God would make the baby I could not deny was real somehow go away. I could not have an abortion. I could not withstand the pain physically and I could not withstand the pain mentally. I drift into my fantasy world, praying God would miraculously solve this problem.

The next day I stayed in bed all day long. I had the most awful cramps, accompanied with bouts of vomiting. I was accustomed to cramping before or during my cycle. However, the cramping I was experiencing felt unbearable. The pain in my lower back felt like sharp knives. The cramps were occurring every two hours forcing me into the fetal position on my bedroom floor. Each cramp reminded me of that dreadful night with Mark, and I thought God is punishing me. I know God is punishing me for giving Mark my virginity and having pre-marital sex. My family was oblivious to the world of the wars occurring within my mind and body because no one thought my behavior was odd. Later that afternoon I began to experience heavy bleeding accompanied with huge clots. I knew the egg passed through menstruation, but these clots were bigger and they kept coming. I wanted to tell someone, but I'm afraid of what is happening. I think I know what is happening, but I have to endure this pain or take a chance of ruining my future, and most importantly Mark's future. Mark called me later that night. I gave him an abbreviated version of the painful experience I had that day. He tried to comfort me the best way he knew how and was worried about my safety. By the next afternoon the bleeding and cramps subsided. I did not bleed the next day or the day after. I knew what had happened.

When Mark came to visit me for the first time my parents were not very excited, but I was! I was looking for ways to spend the entire weekend with him, although I was living in my parents' home. I did not feel the need to explain to my parents that I would not be spending my weekend with them. I assumed they knew since I was an adult.

I knew my boyfriend would probably have to go through a series of tests before he would get my family's approval. I was anticipating my parents' reaction to Mark. I brought Mark over to meet my family one Sunday afternoon when my family was cooking out. My mom was cordial; my father on the other hand was not cordial at all. My younger cousins were playing basketball, and we decided we should have a race. My cousins wanted Mark and my father to participate as well. Mark was a track runner, and well my dad was not. However, my dad was still in good physical shape. I was hoping Mark would let my dad win. Oh, did I forget to mention Mark does not like to lose. Of course, Mark won, and that gave my dad another reason not to like him.

Anyway, my family could see I was in love with this guy, and they could see a change in me. I went from the quiet, reserved young woman to a beaming light bouncing all over the walls. When he was leaving to return home I gave him a kiss, and my parents saw this. They could obviously see from the kiss and our body language we were intimate. As I watched his Toyota Tercel depart, I walked back to my house to read a book and fantasize about the next time I would see him. My mother obviously saw the excitement written on my face, and was intent on putting an end to what she considered madness.

She grabs my arm and yells, “What do you think you are doing?”

I reply very sarcastically, “what does it look like I’m doing”?

My mother asks, “Where were you this weekend?”

“Why?” I reply in a very sarcastic tone.

“Because you living in my house and I can ask you whatever I want to ask?

Where the hell were you this weekend Shemika Maria Harris?”

Ohh... I hate when she calls me by my full name. Anytime she calls me by my full name it is not good. We are about to argue, but I am prepared.

“I was with Mark.” I respond with a hint of defiance as I sashay to my room.

“You were with Mark! Did he have you up in some hotel?” My mother yells angrily.

“Does it matter? I mean...what is the big deal. I’m grown and it doesn’t matter.”

“You ain’t that grown if you living under my house.” My mother shot back at me.

“I mean when I’m at college I go out when I want to, I go where I want to go, and I do what I want to do. I do not call and ask for your permission. I am an adult now, and you should stop treating me like a child” I reply defensively.

Looking me directly in the eyes, my mom says, “You ain’t acting like an adult, you acting like a hoe!”

“A hoe....!” I repeat under my breath with a bit of shock.

I can’t believe my mother called me a whore, excuse me a hoe. Actually I would have preferred whore over hoe. I laugh sarcastically! It hurts that my mom

referred to me as a whore, but I am probably more angry than hurt. I thought this was a great time for her to finally step in and be a mother. You want to establish values now that I have left and went off to college. I figured everything else out on my own, now you want to step in and give direction. Sorry it's too late.

The argument continued with my parents, and I could not understand the problem. My dad told me I was sending him to hell because of my sin. He made some comment about the sins of the child are also the sins of the father. I sarcastically replied he had a ticket to hell long before I committed any sin. I couldn't believe my father of all people would have the gall to discuss sin. Are you serious? In any case, we argued and argued. I told my parents they were going to have to accept the fact Mark was a part of my life and I would be spending many more nights with him. My dad walked away disgusted, and my mom was disappointed. I on the other hand was furious with my parents for addressing my relationship. When did my family enroll in the "let's have morals class"? This was the same family that would fight at every family gathering, drink alcohol like water, deny known cases of sexual abuse that occurred in my family, and now you want to judge my relationship? Please!

Although my parents had their concerns about Mark that summer, I on the other hand was having a ball. The summer I was with Mark, I would have to say was one of the happiest time in my life. It was like the happiness I used to daydream about or dream about except it was really happening. I felt like for the first time, I could expect or should expect good things to happen to me. When I am with my Mark I feel like a caged bird set free. For so long I desired the human touch. Mark is extremely affectionate and that's something I need. When I grew

up there were no hugs, no kisses good-bye, no I love you. I always hug him because I have waited so long to have someone to hold me and express their love for me.

The best thing is that the feeling is mutual. It's like Mark and I connect on so many levels that we didn't have to communicate what we were feeling. I remember before I left for summer break, Mark gave me a book by one of his favorite authors. The book was called, *Black Girl Lost* by Donald Goines, such an appropriate title on so many levels. The book details the experience of Sandra and Chink. Sandra is exposed to sexual abuse and has an alcoholic mother. At the age of eight Sandra resorts to shoplifting to survive and when she becomes a teenager she meets Chink. Chink is an African American male that has some issues with his own self-image, yet he's physically built and smart. He uses these two qualities to become profitable in drug pushing. When Sandra meets Chink, she becomes involved in his drug deals. She becomes financially stable and more importantly she discovers love. The story ends tragically, but there is an undeniable connection between Sandra and Chink. The story reminded me so much of Mark and me. It's like we knew we had to support each other, and the way Chink protected Sandra was the same way Mark protected me. I felt safe with Mark and I was no longer afraid of my father. We both had some traumatic experiences during our childhood. Experiences that made us both feel that we had to compensate. There was so much guilt and shame we both carried, but none of it was ours to carry. Yet, we knew with each other we could just be ourselves. We pushed each other but we accepted each other.

That summer Mark and I lived two hours apart, and it was difficult to adjust to the long distance. I did not have a car, so he came to visit me. One morning while getting ready for church, I was sad because I missed Mark. My nephew ran to me and said, "Auntie your boyfriend is outside." My family was notorious for playing tricks, and it was very easy to trick me. They had played this trick before, but I was not going to fall for it this time. However, I walked by my living room window, and sure enough he was outside playing with my nephew. I could not believe it! It was Sunday, and I knew he had to work the next day. I ran into his arms, and I was overjoyed! We had seen each other the week before, and he isn't supposed to visit for at least another two weeks. However, he said he missed me, and he had to see me. He would surprise me often. When he would visit we usually spent the time going out, but we spent a lot of time just talking. The best day of that summer was my birthday. He gave me a gold heart pendant necklace because he said I would always have a piece of his heart.

That summer I was very determined to get my first car. Mind you, I did not know how to drive, but I wanted a car. My father tried to teach me how to drive, but my dad was very aggressive and loud. My father scared me and often I would cry. When I attempted to acquire my license, I did not consider it a major thing, until I didn't pass the test. My family made fun of me and they could not understand how someone with my intelligence had failed a driver license's test. Tracey would often say I had all the book sense, but no common sense. I was going to prove her wrong. I studied before I took the test and I got my license. I was so anxious to get a car, and so my dad bought me a car. It was a 1992 Ford Festiva. I loved the car, and I thought it was cute. My siblings laughed at my car

and I was embarrassed when Mark could lift my car with one hand. As stated before, my driving skills were horrible. One day I was driving to the store and I was not paying attention. I crossed a major highway, and instead of waiting in the median I went straight across. Two vehicles hit me, and I totaled my car. I was okay, but my sister was injured. Mark called every day, and at the end of the week he came to visit me. I had my car for a total of two weeks, and now it was totaled. That did not discourage me because I found another car.

I loved Mark because he did anything he could to please me. He wasn't seeking to please me to appease me, but because he wanted to make me happy. Sometimes you can ask someone to do something for you that required sacrifice on their part. The individual will accommodate your request because they want to appease you, and do not want to hear you complain. They will always remind you that they did something for you, and how they sacrificed for you. I was used to this with my family. There were few times when I could recall the times someone did something for me because it was in their heart to do it. This was my boyfriend. That summer Mark's cell phone bill was extremely expensive. Actually, it was over \$1,000 because he talked to me all the time, and my parents could not afford long distance. I told you my parents were broke! Mark drove to see me at least twice a month, and I never gave him any gas money. When we went out, he paid, not me. Again, Mark was not from a wealthy family, this was money coming from his pocket. That summer he worked for a valet company and he would take his money from his tips to pay his bills, put money in savings, and see me. That summer we went to Atlanta for his birthday. On our way back home, he had to drive three hours back to his hometown, and then an additional

two hours to take me home. He never complained. Mark did not expect anything from me except love, and I had a lot of love to give.

In my eyes and heart, he was heaven sent because he accepted me for me. My family was not your average family, and my boyfriend was from the average family. I was unsure if Mark would judge me based on my family. I lost friends and relationships based on my family's reputation. I was hesitant Mark would do the same. Although my family was different, Mark never acted different. Regardless if some of my relatives had an education, or were uneducated, he was always at ease. Mark was intelligent and wise, but he wasn't boastful. He could relate to the janitor or the old shade-tree mechanic, and later have an intelligent conversation about any issue. On his visits he always gave my mother and sisters a hug and kiss on the cheek. This may seem simple to some people, but it meant a great deal to me. In my family we never expressed love like this, and my mom's eyes would gleam when he was around. My niece and nephew loved him. Many times he would play basketball with them or spend time with them listening to them talk.

My younger brother, Michael, was becoming a teenager during this time. My family could not afford to purchase nice clothes for Michael. I shared with Mark my young brother's struggle, and Mark knew this for himself. He knew my family's situation. On one of his numerous visits, he did something very surprising. He asked me to come to his car to get something out the trunk. There were bags in his trunk and he needed assistance carrying the bags. I inquired on the items in the bags, and he told me they were clothes for my younger brother. He was going through his closet. He realized he did not need some things, so he

decided to give them to my brother. I was so touched he thought enough of my brother to help him. His love for me was greater than me; it was for the people I loved as well.

Every Little Bit Hurts

Every little bit hurts, Every little bit hurts.

Every night I cry, every night I sigh, every night I wonder why
you treat me cold, yet you won't let me go.

Every little hurt counts, every little hurt counts,

You say you're coming home, yet you never phone, leave me all alone,
my love is strong for you, I'd do wrong for you.

I can't take this loneliness you've given me.

I can't go on giving my life away.

Oh, come back to me, darling you'll see,

I can give you everything that you wanted before, if you will stay with me.

Every little bit hurts, every little bit hurts

To you I'm a toy and you're the boy, who has to say when i should play.

Yet you hurt me, desert me.

Oh, come back to me, darling you'll see,

I can give you everything that you wanted before.

If you will stay with me.

Every little bit hurts, every little bit hurts,

Every little bit hurts, every little bit hurts.

(Keys, 2005, track 9)

Narrative Background: As Mark and I transitioned into new stages of our life during our undergraduate experience, the relationship was tested and this narrative will illustrate my attempts to deny the impending changes.

Where did the time go? I went from a college freshman who was young, dumb, and in love. Now I was a junior in college, who is still young, dumb, and much more in love. My relationship with Mark is still strong. We managed to make it through the dissolution of my old friendships and his pledging a fraternity. I am beginning to realize some friends are in your life for a reason and for a season. The ending of the friendships is a result of my mistakes and my friends' mistakes as well. The only thing you can do is learn from the experience, and keep it moving. Although I do admit, there were times I became lonely.

However, I knew I was not alone because I have Mark. Yes, I think Mark knew this to be true as well. While he was going through his trials and tribulations pledging his fraternity, he knew I possessed an enduring love and commitment towards him. Joining a fraternity caused a great strain on our relationship. Whether it was cooking every day for him, washing his clothes, encouraging him, doing his homework or writing papers (although he said he could have written better papers) I was there. I was ecstatic when he finally became a member of his fraternity. His pledging made me further anticipate the day when I could become a member of the sorority of my choice. I was there for him during that tumultuous time, and I knew without any doubt he would be there for me as well.

It was the fall semester of my junior year; and I was a resident assistant. I was required to serve as a leader, role model, and confidant for young women in a residence hall. Becoming a resident assistant required a great deal of my time, but I was willing to put in the time. Being a resident assistant was something I truly enjoyed. Although, I now had to abide by the policies I was accustomed to breaking for the past two years.

My relationship with Mark is changing, but I'm not sure if it is good or bad. Mark's involvement in his fraternity requires his attendance at certain events, clubs, parties, etc. I did not have a problem with this, until we stopped spending time together. Our time together was contingent upon his commitments to his fraternity. I quickly noticed how his attitude changed. He always looked nice, but now it was imperative for him to wear only designer labels. In the beginning, it was not a problem for him to visit me in my residence hall. Suddenly visiting me became a hassle.

Mark also behaved in a manner I felt was disrespectful. When we attended parties, he danced with other females. I didn't overact. Yet, when I asked him to dance he walked away or he had something to do. Minutes later, I would look across the room and there he was dancing with another female. Maybe it was my insecurity peeking through because I felt he would rather spend time with another person instead of spending time with the person he claimed to love. Maybe it was my woman's intuition telling me something was wrong with this picture, my feelings were justified, and I didn't deserve to be treated this way. Maybe it was both. Maybe I knew I was insecure, but I was insecure because deep down inside I knew Mark's feelings were changing towards me. Maybe he had

moved to a point where he didn't want to be in a relationship. I decided to discuss my feelings with him, and as usual, I received the same response. He told me I was overacting and insecure. Instead of following my own wisdom, I listened to him.

No matter how much I wanted to blame myself for being insecure, the reality of my relationship was coming true. The more active Mark became in his fraternity the less I saw him. He became extremely busy with his fraternity because he was responsible for organizing an annual event for his fraternity. Because of his overwhelming responsibility, he had mandatory practice for this event every day at a certain time. I had a class with one of his fraternity brothers, Keaton. Keaton knew Mark and I were not spending much time together, and so he suggested I come to the practice. I wanted to surprise Mark and have a chance to see him at work for his fraternity he loves so much.

I arrived at the practice. The room was full of young ladies and his fraternity brothers. When his fraternity brothers saw me they were cordial as usual, but he was different. Mark appeared upset or alarmed by my presence. Maybe he was upset because he did not invite me or maybe he was upset because he felt I had invaded his territory. Maybe I could understand his reaction. Yet, to act cold and act as if I was not his girlfriend truly hurt my feelings. No acknowledgement of me or who I was to him. I observed the females' reaction and knew they were trying to determine who I was. Was I someone's friend, sister, etc? The young women did not know me. Which was a definite indicator to me the women did not know Mark had a girlfriend.

On the other hand, there was one female present I would come to know very personally. I knew this female, but I did not know her personally. Her name was Jessica. I remember seeing Jessica around campus, but then again I saw many people. It did not bother me when I was at a party one night, and I saw Jessica talking to Mark. I was there with my friends and I was walking to the bathroom. On my way to the bathroom, I saw the two of them talking in a corner. They were in plain sight, and the interaction appeared harmless. By the looks on their faces, I could see they were in a deep conversation. I looked at my boyfriend, but he did not see me. Whatever they were discussing I could tell he was deeply immersed in their conversation, and she had his full attention. I wondered what else she had of his. If she had captured his attention in such a way, did she have his mind, his heart? I realized I was being insecure, so I brushed the incident off. I was not bothered, so I continued on my way.

However, the rest of the night something kept bothering me. I was not opposed to him having female friends, but something was different. So later in casual conversation, I brought up his conversation with Jessica. He revealed they talked on the phone occasionally and they were friends. As he rambled on and on about their friendship, I could not help but to think to myself, do you talk to any people on the phone other than Mark?

Well... I did not.

However, if they were friends and she needed someone to talk to, what would it hurt?

Shortly after this incident, Mark was making travel arrangements for a trip out of town for a fraternity event. I was concerned about him leaving because we

hadn't spent any time together that entire week. He could sense my tension regarding his absence, so he promised me we would spend Thursday night together. Therefore, Thursday night came and I waited. I waited, called, waited, called, and waited, and waited. It was 12:30 a.m. and I was so disappointed. I had called, left messages, left pages, called his room number, and nothing. Suddenly at 12:45 a.m. Mark returned my call.

“Hey you called me” Mark said casually

“Yeah, I called you. I thought we were going to do something tonight. Since you are going out of town tomorrow, and gone for the entire weekend.” I said with an attitude.

“Oh I'm over in Jessica's room with Dewayne and we lost track of time.”

Mark and his fraternity brother were in Jessica's room. I was confused. Since Mark and Jessica were friends, I was fine with their friendship. However, he had a girlfriend.

Why was he spending time with Jessica, and I will reiterate in her room at 12:30 a.m? We planned to spend the night together, he was in Jessica's room, he lost track of time, and now I should accept this?

“We are getting ready to leave. Why don't you come over to my apartment? I have a photo shoot at 8:00 a.m., so you will have to leave early in the morning.” He mentioned as the solution to this problem.

“Come over... Mark its almost 1:00 a.m. and I will have to leave early in the morning.”

What are we going to do at 1:00 am? Other than the obvious! As he made excuses over the phone, I realized that over the past few weeks our relationship

had become an afterhours sleepover at his apartment. As I hung up the phone, I was so hurt. How could he put some random female before me?

As I packed my overnight bag, I called Keaton because I was upset. I knew that sometimes I had a tendency to over analyze a situation, and think myself into a tizzy. However, this time I felt so different. I did not believe that I was asking for too much from Mark, and I was not being high maintenance. As the phone rang, I hoped that Keaton would pick up the phone.

“Hello”

“Hey Keaton, it’s Shemika`.”

“What’s up? What you doing up girl ?” Keaton asked with concern.

“Keaton, I don’t know if I can do this.” I moaned with discontent.

“Do what Shemika`.”

“This thing with Mark. You know he is really changing. I can’t put my finger on it, but it seems like every day we are growing farther and farther apart. For instance last Friday, we were supposed to spend time together. I cooked this meal for him, and later in the night he had to leave. Do you know what he had to do? Go to a fraternity party with “the bros”, in Nashville. Of course, I was upset, we got into an argument and he left. Tonight we were supposed to spend the night together since you all have your state convention this weekend. Do you know where he was tonight...in Jessica’s room until 12:30 a.m.! I can’t really explain it. Maybe it is the fraternity or maybe it’s Jessica. I just know something is wrong, and I don’t know what to do about it.”

“Well Shemika`, I don’t know what you should do.” Keaton says with confusion

“Are you sure Keaton? Is there something going on with Mark and Jessica? I need to know because I feel like my relationship is falling apart right in front of me, and there is nothing I can do about it. You know something don’t you Keaton” I respond inquisitively

“Shemika....”

“No... Keaton, don’t Shemika me. You are my friend. If you know something please tell me. Even if it is going to hurt my feelings, I rather know.” I respond anxiously

It was a difficult choice for my friend to make, but he decided to tell me about Mark’s friendship with Jessica. In the midst of their budding friendship, Mark or Jessica expressed, -who knows- that although they both were in committed relationships the door to explore was open. When I heard this, my heart dropped. Had Mark walked, ran, or was he dragged through this door? From his actions, I could conclude that he was more than willing to walk through this door.

As I drove to Mark’s apartment, I reviewed my relationship with Mark. His behavior on a recent trip to my home alarmed me. On the entire trip, we argued over trivial issues. I tried to make amends and keep the peace, but he remained upset. On an outing with my family, he acted very distant and segregated himself from the group. Tracey inquired about Mark’s behavior, and I was at a lost for words and understanding. The missed calls, the sudden resistance in visiting, the limited quality time, the blatant disrespect all the signs were there. Maybe Mark was trying to tell me all along. He did not want to be in a relationship. Sometimes actions speak louder than words.

When I arrived at Mark's apartment, he acted as though everything was okay. I walked in the apartment put my bag on the floor, and sat on the bed. He was preparing for his photo shoot in the morning for a calendar. He was chosen to represent his fraternity in a Greek calendar, and he was so excited. As I sat on his bed, I was truly baffled. Standing before me was the man who I truly loved, and yet, he was totally enamored with himself. As we prepared for bed, he finally remembered I was there.

"Hey are you okay" Mark asked

"Oh, I'm fine." I whispered

"You sure." Mark responded

"Yeah, I'm fine." I respond with a reassuring smile.

He rolled over and slept like a baby. I on the other hand rolled over and stared at the yellow cylinder block wall in his apartment. This thing with Mark and Jessica was tearing at me, but I had to be careful when I mentioned it. For one, I did not want Keaton to be get involved, and although I adored Mark he was a manipulator. He knew just how to maneuver his way out of almost anything. As I drifted off to sleep around 4:00 a.m., I was anxious about what tomorrow would bring.

Unfortunately the next morning, my anger had not subsided. I was upset and I had a lot of questions. The night before I was silent and had a lot to think about. I had thought long and hard, and now I was angry. As I mulled the previous events in my mind, I knew it was time to confront Mark. I left a message on his voicemail, and he knew I was angry. He decided to grace me with his presence for an hour before he left to go out of town.

He walked through the door with flowers, teddy bear, and a card. I looked at him with so much contempt, so he knew I was angry. As we walked to my room I didn't say a word, and he looked puzzled. Usually I was touched by his loving gestures, but something was up. Since he was finished with the pleasantries, I began to ask him questions.

"So Mark what happened last night' I ask accusingly

"What do you mean" He asked dumbfound

"What happened last night with us?"

"Like I told you Shemika`, I lost track of time. I told you I was sorry."

Mark responded with annoyance.

"But Mark, this wasn't the first time." I retort with frustration

"What are you talking about Shemika?"

"What I am talking about is our relationship. Over the past couple of months, you have been very rude to me. It seems like something else or someone else has your attention, is that someone Jessica" I asked curiously.

"What are you talking about? Jessica and I cool. That is it. You are my girlfriend, and that's it on that issue." Mark responded firmly.

"Really" I said with an attitude.

"Yes, Shemika, there is nothing going on with Jessica."

"If that was true Mark why did you and Jessica state that you were willing to explore your options, although you two are in committed relationships? Please explain that Mark."

"I didn't say that" Mark said confidently.

I knew he was lying because he told Keaton the comment, so why would Mark lie about the comment now? Was he lying because he made the comment? Was Mark lying because if Jessica made the comment he was willing to take Jessica up on her offer, and he didn't anticipate me finding out about his indiscretion? Therefore, I asked him the question I knew he was dreading.

"No, Mark you did say that. I have one question to ask you. Are you attracted to Jessica? I could determine by his body language and eye contact he was hiding something.

"No, I'm not attracted to Jessica. You are my girlfriend and I told you we were cool." Mark responded firmly.

"Just because I'm your girlfriend doesn't mean that you may not be attracted to other people, one person in particular."

"Look Shemika, this is stupid. You are insecure. I can't help you are insecure, so you can't blame this on me and make this my issue. You are the one with the issue." Mark replied intensely. There it goes. I was waiting on him to pull the "Yes Alex, I would like the Shemika it's your fault card for \$500.00."

Realizing that he has a way out, Mark continued to deflect. "Shemika, you cannot expect for our relationship to be stable if you are insecure and do not trust me."

Of course any person would say that when you have been caught. He turned the table on me by accusing me of not trusting him. The fact was not a matter of trust. I was examining his actions. I reviewed his past actions, and I had reason to question him. I didn't want to bring up the past, but I had to examine his past actions. I could not deny Mark had once cheated on his

girlfriend with me. When I found out about it he lied to protect himself and his reputation. I truly believed that when Mark and I started our relationship he was a changed person. Up until this point, I knew Mark was faithful to me. However, we cheat in our minds long before the action takes place. I was truly afraid Mark didn't learn his lesson the first time. His indiscretion almost ended our friendship, and I knew his ex-girlfriend was hurt as well. He had hurt my feelings and my trust for him diminished quickly. I hoped he would not make the same mistake twice.

Instead of addressing the problems with our relationship, he deflected by stating how he surprised me with a gift, and I was ungrateful. Other females would be thankful if their boyfriend surprised them with gifts. How could I act appreciative when he was with Jessica last night; yet, he promised he was going to be with me. Purchasing material things could not and would not replace the immaterial needs I wanted him to fulfill. Why did he think he could buy my love, gratitude, and trust?

I looked in Mark's eyes. I knew the man who was standing before me was lying. Last night Mark casually mentioned Jessica was attending this out of town event as well, and guess what he was riding with her. Call it insecurity or call it fighting for what you love, but I asked him not to ride with her. I knew I was asking this because I was insecure. I did not want him in a situation where something could happen. Although I was insecure about my relationship, and I had reason to be, I was trying to control Mark. Since Mark could not make the right decision, I decided to make it for him.

When you love someone you will do anything to make them feel better or feel secure. Couldn't Mark see this? Couldn't Mark see the woman he claimed to love so much needed him? I needed him to reassure me. I needed him to take away the doubt burning in my mind. I needed him to reassure me we were okay with his actions. This was what I thought love was. I thought love was truly expressed when someone would sacrifice their wants to meet your needs. So again, I made a heartfelt request to Mark.

“Mark, can you please find someone else to ride with. I mean all of your brothers are going can you not find someone else to ride with?”

He turned his body away from me and looked out the window.

I knew he had plenty of fraternity brothers driving and he had more than enough time to make other arrangements. I was willing to allow him to use my car for the entire weekend. He was borrowing money from me for a hotel for the weekend, so he would not have to stay with all his fraternity brothers, and he could use my car. I did not mind going car-less for the weekend. I heard the television blaring in the background, and felt the sun beaming through my window. The silence grew stronger, and so I asked, I pleaded one last time.

“Can you please drive my car or ride with someone else. ...Please?”

His reply was...

“No...I'm riding with Jessica.” He took the money for his hotel room, and he left.

Breakdown

You called yesterday
To basically say
That you care for me but
That you're just not in love
Immediately I pretended to be
Feeling similarly
And led you to believe
I was ok to just walk away from the
One thing that's unyielding and sacred to me

Well I guess I'm trying to be nonchalant about it
And I'm going to extremes to prove I'm fine without you
But in reality I'm
Slowly losing my mind
Underneath the guise of smile
Gradually I'm dying inside
Friends ask me how I feel
And I lie convincingly
Cause I don't want to reveal
The fact that I'm suffering
So I wear my disguise
Til I go home at night
And turn down all the lights
And then I breakdown and cry

So what do you do when
Somebody you're so devoted to
Suddenly just stops loving you
And it seems they haven't got a clue
Of the pain that rejection is putting you through
Do you cling to your pride

And sing "I Will Survive"
Do you lash out and say
How dare you leave this way
Do you hold in vain
As they just slip away
(Carey, 1997, track 6)

Narrative Background: The termination of the relationship with Mark affected me physically, emotionally, and mentally as depicted in the following narrative. The song for this narrative personified the image I projected as a strong and resilient woman. Yet, the song exposed and provided insight into my self-degrading beliefs and feelings of shame, inferiority, and low self-worth.

I tried to catch my balance. My mind was playing tricks on me. This had to be a nightmare. I prayed and I knew in a few moments when I awoke from this nightmare things would be okay. I knew Mark would come to my room. He would give me flowers, a teddy bear, and a card to let me know he was sorry. He would begin to tell me how he took me for granted. He would tell me how much he loved me and he would never do anything to jeopardize our relationship again. Yes, he had put me on the back burner these past few months. Yes, I felt him taking me in his arms and then...

Suddenly, a knock at the door. I realized I was not dreaming, but this was reality. There were flowers, there was a teddy bear, there was a card, but there was one crucial element missing in this scene.

Where was Mark?

The knock came again. I looked in the mirror, dried my eyes, and walked to the door. It was one of my residents. She heard a loud cry come from my room, and she thought it was me. I told her my television's volume was loud, and I was on the phone chatting with my friends. I apologized for the noise, and she asked if I was okay. I assured her everything was fine. I told her to have a good weekend, and I would see her on Sunday evening. I closed the door.

Shot back into my own reality again. Did this really just happen?

“Did Mark just leave?”

“Did Mark leave to be with Jessica?”

I had to speak these words aloud in order for them to register in my brain. I almost released another piercing cry, but I held it in this time. I sat on my bed trying desperately to gather my thoughts. So what does this mean? Did he choose her over me? Did he say no because I gave him an ultimatum. Did he say no because he wanted to be with her? What had just happened?

When things in life get this tough I usually pray. However, my spiritual life was non-existent. Church, what church? I think I went to church maybe four times a year now that I was in college. The only times I recalled attending church was when I was at home. Instead of talking to God, I did what every woman does when she lacks a personal relationship with God. I called all my girlfriends. I told them the story, and they gave me their opinions. I mean I had my own insights, but my mind was so gone I could not think. The consensus was the same. You need to get out of this relationship. It was evident this man was selfish. The only person Mark loved was himself. Although I knew there could be some validity to their opinions, I could not accept it. No, my mind could accept it, but my heart could not accept it. This guy had my heart, and he was everywhere in my head. Immediately, I called him. He did not pick up. I called, called, and called. I left messages, I left pages, I had my friends call on three-way, I called from restricted numbers, and still no answer. The worst possible thing for me to do during this time was to be alone, but I felt so alone. I felt my world was crashing down on me. I kept thinking, thinking, and thinking. Finally, I knew what I had to do. I knew I

was driven more by emotion, than logic, but I did not care I was hurt. I called him and left him a message--- it was over!

So, you know I continued to call. Yes, I had left the message, but I wanted to talk. I wanted to know why he made this decision, but still no answer. That weekend I did not eat. I could not eat. I was so emotionally disgusted I was too weak to eat. I cried all day long. I had a cry so deep in my soul I prayed God would hear me.

Hear me, and do what? What was supposed to happen now? I had called and ended the relationship. Yes, the relationship was over, but I was still in love with him. I still wanted him. Although I wanted Mark, I knew in my heart that he had chosen her over me. I knew he had lied to me. I knew right now that he was with her. I knew right now that she was probably sleeping with him. I was hoping he would not have sex with her, but something in my heart knew what was going on. Although I did not want to accept this, I knew it was time for me to face reality.

I had to be real. I gave Mark money to finance his rendezvous. The hotel room was for him and her. That was the real reason why he did not want to stay at the hotel with his fraternity brothers. The resistance in spending time with me was simple. He was spending time with her. What really hurt was his unwillingness to ride with someone else or drive my car. If they were just friends, couldn't he explain to her he was riding with someone else or he decided to drive? He could not do this because he wanted to be with her. The truth was staring me right in the face. Yes, it was staring me in the face, but I still wanted him. I wanted to believe I had overacted. I wanted to believe I was insecure. I wanted to

believe I was too emotional, and had made an irrational decision. Yes, the blame was on me, and not him. How could I think he was unfaithful? I was the one with the problem. Funny, you can make yourself believe a lie, and that is just what I did. I bought into the lie, and I took total blame for the situation.

When Mark got back in town, he finally called me. I tried to pretend everything was okay, and nothing had happened. He noticed this immediately, and addressed the message, well messages I had left on his phone. He told me he was not willing to get back in a relationship where there was no trust. Since I lacked trust in him, there was no reason for us to be together. I tried to convince Mark I did trust him and I was emotional. He was right. In my heart of hearts, I did not trust him. However, at the time I would rather live a lie than to be alone.

It was very difficult adjusting to the fact that we were broken up. The night after I had spoken with Mark I attended the interest meeting of the sorority I respected so highly. Having the privilege to serve this sorority and build a sisterly bond with other aspiring women was something I truly wanted. I could not wait for the day when I could water my ivy, take road trips with my sands, and finally wear my favorite color pink. Yes, having the chance to be a member of a sorority I truly esteemed was the one positive thing in my life at the time. Until, I went to my interest meeting.

There she was. It was Jessica. I couldn't believe it. Sitting a couple of rows behind me with pearl earrings on! I can't believe she had the audacity to wear pearl earrings! It was the girl I saw talking to my boyfriend. It was the female my boyfriend was visiting at 12:30 a.m. It was the same female who spent the entire

weekend with my boyfriend. Yes, it was Jessica. I could barely deal with the fact she was with my boyfriend. Now she could possibly be my sorority sister!

Life was definitely taking a turn for the worse.

The interest meeting came and we waited. During this time, I was so emotionally bent with the situation with my ex, that I could barely concentrate on school or sorority matters. I prayed to God this girl would not get pick because I could not deal with it. I was woman enough to admit yes, I was being petty, but I was being petty because I was hurt. Isn't it enough that I had to see them at the party dancing and kissing? A week after we broke up there they were, together. I remember attending a party his fraternity sponsored. That night at the party he would dance with me and then he would dance with her. It was as if he was playing some sick game with our emotions. Right in my face, and like an idiot I cried. Isn't it enough I had to see her car parked at his apartment? Only wondering what they could possibly be doing. Isn't it enough that I had to hear from everyone how Mark had left me and in a matter of a couple of days, he was with her?

Yes, I knew Mark and Jessica were now together, everyone knew. I knew this, but I felt I had something she did not have and that was his love. Yes, we were not together but we talked, well we argued on the phone. As long as I knew I had his ear, I knew I had his heart. Some days were good days. Some days I would really think we had a chance of mending our failing relationship. I honestly thought that the way to get back to his heart was having sex with him. I thought if I had sex with him, he would remember the love we shared. So one night I told him I wanted to talk to him in person, so I went to visit him. That

night I knew I was spending the night with him, and I knew that we would make love. Well, we did have sex. Yes, we were not together, but I still loved him. We had protected sex; well I was on birth control. We did not use a condom. I trusted him, and I knew I was the only woman he was having sex with because he loved me. We had sex quite often, although I was not his girlfriend. I did everything I could to appeal to his heart, but his heart was closed to me, so I waited.

Although I waited, I tried to use other diversions or people to take my mind off Mark. Earlier that semester I met a young man who would become a great friend and confidant. Although Mark was so caught up in his own world, and assumed that every living female creature on earth was pining away for him, I on the other hand had my admirers as well. While we were together, I couldn't fathom the thought of talking to another guy; however, when we broke up I needed someone to fill the lonely nights. That someone was Anthony.

Anthony was very different from Mark. Anthony was older, well five to six years older was and he was a gentleman. Maybe he had taken advanced classes on how to treat a woman, whatever the course was I am pretty sure he passed with A's. He was tall, dark, ball head, with gleaming white teeth. His smile could put any troubled soul to ease. He was sensitive and so attentive. Something I definitely needed at the time.

Spending time with Anthony was always a treat. When Anthony came to visit me, he always came bearing gifts. The gifts he would bring were not expensive in nature, but very sentimental. It was not his intention to buy my friendship because he was a giving person. Each gift he gave me always had a

special meaning. I specifically recall one of my favorite gifts. It was a small cherub, and he gave me the gift with the intent that I always had someone watching over me.

My friendship with Anthony flourished very quickly. Although I didn't want this to happen, I think he was my rebound. Anthony knew Mark, and he knew how our relationship ended. One night he came to see me at work, and we were talking about relationships. Although I never specifically stated that I was talking about Mark, the emotion behind every word and action that night implied it was Mark. From my countenance, it was apparent that I was very hurt by the situation. As an outsider and as a friend, Anthony revealed the harsh truth about my past relationship with Mark. He revealed to me the Mark's selfishness and the lack of trust on my part. As a man, he was very real with me. He explained to me why men do certain things that are hurtful to women, and why they will continue to do those things because women allow them to get away with it. Although I was a young woman, I could very well see the logic behind his arguments. I could understand the logic, but I refused to accept it.

Although I was young and very naïve, there was one thing I knew. Love is a powerful force that can heal you or hurt you. You can use the love someone has for you for good, and to bring out the best in them. On the other hand, you can use the love someone has for you to bring out the worse in him or her. As I reviewed my relationship with Mark, I became conscious of the truth that many times his love was used to bring out the best in me, but sometimes his love was also used to bring out the worse in me as well. Yes, I agreed with Anthony's logic;

however, I did not understand why would anyone use this power to hurt someone who deeply loves you?

In every situation, we go through in life, I truly believe God will send you someone or something to comfort you and assist you with the pain of rejection. However, I have also learned that sometimes the farther you are away from God; the harder it is to hear his voice. This is my opinion of Anthony. Anthony is a blessing sent to me in a very dark period of my life. However, I am so far away from God I can't see the blessing standing in front of my face. Instead of giving someone a chance who truly wanted to learn more about me, someone who was truly enamored with me, and wanted to be my friend I decided to pass and wait for someone who was clearly not thinking about me.

I waited for a long time, five months to be exact. I was persistent. I was determined to show Mark I loved him, and wanted his presence in my life. I was lonely during this time, and loneliness is a horrible thing because it forces you to think. Feeling insecure, I constantly examined my perceived flaws. I began to compare myself with Jessica. The more I built her up mentally, the more I tore myself down. I began to examine the many faults I possessed as a woman, and how the ending of this relationship was my fault.

Emotionally, I thought Mark was not with me because I did not trust him. It was true that in his previous relationship he lied and said he did not have a girlfriend, and he lied and said that he never had sex with me. Yes, his actions these past months had given me reason to doubt him. However, he was human, and people make mistakes. I could have been supportive and more

understanding. If he could only spend an hour with me, I should have accepted this.

Physically, I thought Mark was not with me for plenty of reasons. One I was over weight, although I was not. I had actually lost another fifteen pounds from the stress. Second, I was not light-skinned. I noticed how women of a lighter complexion received more attention from men and considered more beautiful than women with darker complexions. I hated when I would hear people say “oh you are pretty for a black girl.”

I was also insecure because I wore a weave. During that time I was suffering from alopecia (a hair condition where the hair comes out in large amounts or small bald spots), so my hair came out occasionally. I had to wear weave, and this made me a bit self-conscious. Sometimes I would hear people say “she wears weave all the time” and I felt that this made me less of a woman and less beautiful. I remember how one of my friends asked me, well rudely suggested that I should remove my weave. Although I had to wear a weave, my hair always looked good. The fact that my friend would suggest this hurt my feelings. I had to forgive my friend because she did not know about my condition. However, what if I didn't have this condition? Would it make me less of a woman or less beautiful if I decided to wear weave? I really admired my friend, but it made me think. Could people really be that superficial? Was our friendship based on looks alone? The fact that she was light-skinned with beautiful long hair did not help this matter. If she felt this way, maybe Mark had the same feelings, but never voiced them. Maybe he wanted someone with long, beautiful hair.

Sexually, I thought Mark was not with me because he was my first and only. I did not have much sexual experience, so he probably thought that I was boring. Spiritually, I felt Mark was not with me because I was not involved in church. Men and their many contradictions! Although guys want to have sex with you, they also want you in church on Sunday morning. It was truly all about appearance. He doesn't care if you are saved or if you trying to have a relationship with God. Men like to look good, and it looks good when he is dating a woman who worships God in front of others. Although the worship may not come truly from the heart or it was forced, it is all about image. I knew my spiritual life was lacking, and this was evident.

I was not going to give up on Mark. At the time, I would do whatever I could to show him I could be the woman he wanted. To fulfill his emotional needs I would cook surprise dinners for him, write him love letters, give him the "I miss you" cards, and constantly tell him how he was such a great man. I tried to rebuild the walls I felt I had torn down with him. During that time, I knew I had done and said some vindictive things to get back at Mark. I do not want to paint the picture that I was always nice, because I was not. I took every item Mark ever gave me, packed it in a box, and left it at his front door. Although I wrote many love letters and I wrote just as many mean and hateful letters to him. Before our relationship ended, one night I asked Mark to drive my car. While he was driving my car, he was pulled over, because my tags were expired. I promised him I would pay the ticket, and he did not have to worry about it. He had to go to court to pay the ticket, and his court date occurred after we were no longer together. He called me and asked for the money. I told him no, I wouldn't give it

to him. He pleaded with me to give him the money. It was only \$120.00 and I had it. However, I was vindictive, and I would not give him the money.

The next week I was leaving the grocery store, and I tried to start my car. My car wouldn't start, and I had to get my car towed. I called Mark, and he picked me up. I found a mechanic to tow and fix my car. I called my parents, but they couldn't help me. I was praying the repair would be something minor, but it isn't. The total repair was going to be around \$120.00. I didn't know where I would get the money, because I wouldn't have the money until the end of the month. Mark asked me to come to his job. When I showed up to see him, he handed me \$120.00, and I felt so bad. The one person I was trying to hurt was the same person who was trying to help me. I tried to hurt him because I was hurt, but it does not mean I was right. In any case, I was determined to show him I was sorry.

Physically, I decided that I would lose weight. I was already in shape, and I had lost fifteen pounds since the breakup. I was determined to lose even more weight. I quit eating, resorted back to diet pills, and I began exercising even more. I began using fade cream to fade my skin. I would use it gradually so there would not be a drastic difference, and I made sure to stay out of the sun. Sexually, I decided I had to become more exciting in the bedroom. I began to read magazine articles that discussed various ways in pleasing your mate. I also made myself available to him, at any time. Although we were not in a relationship, I was always willing to have sex with him. I thought if I withheld sex that was a sign I did not love him.

Spiritually, I decided to start attending church, praying, and reading the bible. When I attended church, I did not comprehend the message given because I spent 90% of my time focusing on Mark. I spent a great deal of my time not praying for me, but praying for Mark. I would pray for God to bless him and bring us back together. I had a way to turn every fault into a positive, except for my hair. I could not change the fact that I had and would lose my hair. I took hair vitamins and anything that would promote hair growth. If that did not work, I prayed that he could learn to look past this flaw. I was determined to be the perfect woman for him.

So you see, I could think of plenty of reasons why my ex was not with me. I understood the reasons, and I did not blame him. Even I did not want to be with me.

Pieces of Me

People just don't know what I'm about
They haven't seen what's there behind my smile
There's so much more of me I'm showin out
(These are the pieces of me)

When it looks like I'm up sometimes I'm down
I'm alone even when people all around,
But that don't change the happiness I found
(These are the pieces of me)

So when you look at my face
You gotta know that I'm made of everything love and pain
(These are the pieces of me)
Like every woman I know
I'm complicated fo sho
But when I love I love til there's no love no mo
(These are the pieces of me)

So many colors
(I make up the woman that you see)
A good friend and lover
(Anything you want Yes I can be)
I can run the business and make time for fantasy
(These are the pieces of me)
Now I'm gonna make mistakes from time to time
But in the end believe that I'm gone fly
No matter if I'm wrong or if I'm right
(These are the pieces of me)

Ohhhh As the pieces of me start to unfold
Now I start to understand
All that I am
A woman not afraid to be strong **STRONG**

I'm a woman... a woman... a woman woman woman
Yes I'm a woman... a woman
These are the pieces of me... yeaahhhh
(Ledisi, 2011, track 1).

Narrative Background: My journey into sisterhood and reconciliation with Mark is portrayed in this narrative. This narrative will illustrate my commitment to my relationship with Mark, and a longing for Mark to reciprocate those feelings.

The spring semester of 2001 had to be better than the previous semester. At least this is what I thought. Things with Mark and I were still up in the air. He and I would go out to eat, watch movies together, and surprisingly he came to visit me during Christmas. Everything was the same, except we were not together. Since I did not have a boyfriend at that time, I became close with five females. These females were Kimberly, Casey, Pam, Sara, and Monique. Kimberly was a pre-med major from Atlanta who had a flair for the arts. Casey was an Accounting major from Memphis , and she was pretty much the big sister. You could talk to Casey about anything and she would understand. Pam was a Pre-Med major from Ripley, TN and she was cool . I knew Pam the least out of the five ladies but she very intelligent, perceptive, and calm. Sara was a Psychology major from Memphis who was very mature for her age. Like Pam, Sara was very level-headed and a big picture thinker. Then there was my best friend, Monique. Monique was a Business major from Atlanta who was full of personality!

We began to spend a great deal of time together, and they were the ones that assisted me in getting my mind off my Mark. We also had a common interest in the same sorority. Joining a sorority or fraternity was a big deal on our campus, well it's a major deal in the African American community. I appreciated

the historical context behind the Black Greek organizations because these groups supported each other during a time where Black people didn't have rights. The organization I was interested in was founded in 1908, and I couldn't even imagine the struggle the members encountered in their efforts to acquire an education. Reading and seeing the path these individuals paved for ladies like me made me proud. The struggle they endured made them closer, which supported my second reason for joining, the sisterhood. Because of the experience you encounter during the membership process you form bonds with people. Bonds that was indestructible because these individuals will support you no matter what. I thought about Mark and his fraternity brothers. They were extremely close and I could see their bonds were deeper than a surface friendship. Mark and his fraternity brothers spent a great deal of time at my apartment so I came to know them personally as well. Like Mark, I was forming close bonds with the other ladies and I was beginning to believe that this friendship would extend past our membership in a sorority.

Sisterhood was the main attraction; however, I must admit that to be chosen as a member of this sorority was considered an honor. Every Black Greek fraternity and sorority was known for certain qualities. For example, Mark's fraternity was known as the intelligent, socially-conscious leaders like their well-known members such as W.E.B. DuBois and Martin Luther King. The sorority I was interested in was known as the pretty, intelligent, feminine, and sophisticated ladies. In order to pledge this sorority on my campus you had to be intelligent, involved in campus activities, and not promiscuous. Although this wasn't communicated on the interest meeting flyer or sorority website you knew.

You knew from conversations about girls who were not accepted because they didn't fit the standard. This message was also transferred by the women who were current members. The sorority had the highest GPA, the members were well-known, and they were pretty. Again, this sorority only accepted the good girls, and I was a good girl. Although the sorority was known to only accept fair-skinned women with long hair, there were some members with my complexion who were accepted. So I thought I had a chance.

During the time I was in the process of becoming a member of my sorority, I was not with Mark. There was no one there to cook me dinner, offer encouragement, write my papers, or to share my thoughts. During this time, these women became my support. Whether it was taking me to the grocery store, picking me up after my late-night classes so I would not have to walk in the dark, or making sure I was taking care of myself. Sometimes it was a sleepover at Kimberly's apartment or we would go out to eat at our favorite restaurant to escape the campus life. We were all very different individuals, but it was our differences that ultimately made us click.

Joining my sorority was on my mind at the time, and my blessing finally came true. I received the call and I was chosen to be a member of this great organization. I was excited because I was finally getting a chance to become a member of this sorority, and blessed to share this same experience with Kimberly, Casey, Pam, Sara, and Monique. I had a very tight bond with these five women, and I was very interested in seeing who else would be there. Joining a sorority for me was truly special because I viewed these ladies like my family. Since I was in college, my relationship with my siblings changed. We talked, but

we were going through entirely different life experiences. I spent more time at college, then home. So naturally, my friends at college took the place of my family. I was from a big family, and was accustomed to sharing and dealing with various personalities. I was excited to see the females I would now call sister. A term I had learned from my membership process that I shouldn't take lightly.

My graduate advisor of my sorority called me to attend a meeting to attain details regarding membership. My friends and I were anxious to see who else would be there. On the day of the meeting Monique and I traveled together, and of course we sat by Kimberly, Casey, Pam, and Sara. As the girls came in I remember seeing some of the faces at our interest meeting, and I saw a real familiar face. It was Jessica. I could not believe it. She made it. Not only had she made it, she was now my sorority sister. Again, I was all for this sisterhood thing, but what do you do when your sorority sister was or was currently dating your ex-boyfriend. I was upset, and of course, my friends could see this. In an effort to ensure that our bond was not severed over a man, Kimberly tried to get the two of us to see common ground. In some ways, I was behaving selfishly, but I could not see the common ground. In my eyes, Jessica was the reason why my relationship ended.

Maybe things had finally ended with my ex and my newfound sorority sister, but Mark finally came around. He mentioned how he realized how superficial Jessica was. Whatever his initial attraction was to Jessica was now disgust. We started spending more time together, and we decided to get back together. I should probably say Mark decided he was now ready commit to me exclusively. Renewing our commitment to our relationship definitely had me

floating on cloud nine. I knew my friends could see the difference in me. I was much happier, more gregarious, and full of joy. For that moment, Spring 2001 I felt so blessed because I was back with the love of my life, and I was becoming a member of my sorority. In my eyes, my life could not be any better. The night I finally became a member of my sorority I was so happy because Mark was there. Mark was there with my pink tea roses and pink and green balloons. He was there, and I was happy.

The spring semester ended, and the days of summer were finally here. During the summer I was working as a resident assistant; therefore, I had the opportunity to live in the campus apartments. I wanted a place of my own so I seized the opportunity. To save money Mark decided to stay with me during the summer. He was living with me rent-free and grocery-free.

My relationship with my sorority sister however had not changed. One day it finally got to a point where she and I had to talk. There was so much nonsense going on between the two of us. I was upset with her because I felt Jessica had purposefully sought out my boyfriend. Her own friend told me how she pursued men who had girlfriends. I couldn't see and did not consider the fact that maybe Mark liked the pursuit and maybe he was the one pursuing her. Jessica was upset with me because she felt I had turned people against her. Jessica thought people had problems with her because of me. We continued to argue continuously and on one occasion, she alluded to the fact that she and Mark had an intimate relationship.

I always knew the two dated, but I never considered them having an intimate relationship. Intimate in regards, to sexual. Even though my thoughts ran wild, I never considered them having sex for real. I hadn't considered this because of two reasons. When Mark and I reunited, I asked him about his relationship with her. He explained to me that there was no relationship. They talked and dated, but nothing happened. I questioned him regarding their trip out of town and the nights I saw her car at his apartment. He reassured me again on both occasions nothing happened. When she made the comment, I immediately hung up the phone. I sat in my bedroom thinking. Mark was in the living room studying. The previous conversation was playing repeatedly in my mind. Did he really have sex with her? I reviewed the past couple of months in my mind. I could forgive him for the disrespect, the lies, the disappointment of not being together, but now this. Mark was my first, and the only man I have ever been with sexually. During the period, while we were apart I dated other guys, but I never considered having sex with them. In my eyes, I had given my body to Mark, and my body was his. The thought of being with another man was disgusting, and I could never hurt him in that way.

So I could not take it anymore. We both had gotten tired of talking about his past relationship with my sorority sister. However, I had to know. Mark knew something was wrong with me. He took a deep breath and asked me a question.

He places his article on the floor and looks at me "What's wrong with you?" he asks in a concerned voice.

"I have a question to ask you. Do you promise to tell me the truth?" As I look into his eyes.

“Of course, what’s up?”

Without any hesitation, I asked the question of the hour. “Did you have sex with Jessica?”

Let me be honest. In my heart, I knew he had sex with her. The opportunity was there, and she was a beautiful woman. He was obviously attracted to her in such a way he was unwilling to sacrifice a trip with her. He obviously had some feelings for her if a couple days after we broke up he was with her. Something was there, and it was more than what he had led me to believe. At that moment, I had to make a decision. What if they had slept together, what would I do now? Would I end the relationship again? Would I stay with him? If I stayed with him what does that say? If I left him what does that say? If he was having sex with Jessica and still having unprotected, sex with me what does that say about him?

Men usually tell women what they think women want to hear. Women usually tell men what they do not want or care to hear. While I was looking at my boyfriend, I could only guess what he was thinking. Do I tell Shemika the truth or do I tell Shemika a lie? If I tell her the truth the following will happen. She will make me leave, she will break up with me again, she will tell everyone I was a dog, and she will truly hate me for the rest of her life. Let’s not forget I am living with her rent-free for a couple of months. This would make the second time I have had sex with another woman while I was having sex with her. If I tell her a lie, she will feel secure. She will feel secure about our relationship, she will trust me, and she will continue to have an undying love for me. Most importantly, if

she believes my lie, she will never trust anything Jessica says because she will think Jessica was only out to hurt her.

While he was making his decision, I had to make a decision. There were two battles going on at that moment, my heart and my ego. Yes, my heart would be crushed if they had sex. My heart could not take this again. I was tired of feeling like his second choice. Why did he have to have sex with these women? I mean, was I not enough? However, my ego would be crushed. You see I would rather hear from him that they had sex, than to hear this from Jessica. I could not take her gloating over the fact she had sex with my boyfriend. So at that moment I made a decision. I would not break up with him if he had sex with her, as long as he told me the truth. I could deal with the matters of the heart later, but I had to make sure we both were on the same page. I did not want any more surprise attacks from her. I had to hear the truth, and all of it.

The moment of silence turned into minutes. We both had decisions to make, and internally we both had made our decisions.

“So.... Mark did you have sex with Jessica?”

He looked me in the eyes and replied, “No, I did not have sex with Jessica.”

I looked into his eyes. My heart dropped, and once again, I was in this situation. Had he not figured it out by now, I knew when he was lying? I was so hurt because I hated being lied to repeatedly. Just one time, admit that yes you were wrong. I accepted his answer, and continued with my daily activities. Yet, something was bothering me. No matter how I tried to shake the feeling, I knew deep down Mark was lying. I tried to rationalize every event in my mind to prove

that he was telling me the truth. If Mark was telling me the truth, why did I have this doubt? When we prepared for bed that night I asked him one more time. He told me no, and I turned my back to him. I looked at the wall and cried.

I knew what happened. I was tired of him always lying to me, and I had to know. I had to know for myself if they had slept together. Since he would not tell me, I would find out on my own. I had a conversation with Jessica and from the details I knew Mark had lied to me. After the conversation I vomited. I looked around my apartment and I felt disgusted. As I lay in my bed, I hear the door open. I knew it was him. As he walked into my bedroom I looked at him, and he looked at me. I was physically and emotionally drained. What do you say? Was there anything to say? I asked him to leave and he begged me not to walk out on him like everyone else had. He had nowhere to go. He could not go home and he did not have anywhere else to live. As he begged, all I could think about was the countless times he had put other people before me. His fraternity came before me, Jessica came before me, and his selfish desires came before me. I was always his second choice or a second thought.

Since he joined his fraternity he was a changed person, and I didn't know who he was. Walk out on him? I was always there. I was there when his dearest cousin died, when his father died, when he broke his back and was hospitalized, when he couldn't go to class and take notes, when he couldn't cook, when he couldn't even wash his dirty underwear, it was me all the time. He walked out on me and on our relationship long before it started. I told him to go and stay with his fraternity brothers, since they had so much love for him. Go stay with Jessica

because I really did not care. I left my apartment, and asked him to be out when I returned.

I had to get away. I left in my car and went to the park. I sat on a swing and cried. I cried because I prayed God would bring Mark back in my life. Yes, God had answered my prayers, but the person I loved the most had caused me so much pain. I did not want to think about this situation, but my mind made me. I had to realize maybe; this guy isn't everything I thought he was. What happened to the man who would do anything for me? What happened to the man who would hold me when I cried? What happened to the man whose waking moments were spent seeking ways to show me how much he cared? Was it the fraternity? Was it a front he had used to get with me? I knew the man at my apartment was not the man I fell in love with.

The fact that he was unfaithful with me, not once but twice was the only thought in my mind. I started to wonder. The nights I came to see him, was she there just moments before I arrived. The nights I was leaving his home, would she come over a couple of minutes later to see him? How did he choose who he was going to be with that night? Did he call me first, and if I wasn't available did he call her? Did he call her first, and if she weren't available would he call me. The many nights he would make love to me and say I love you. Did he tell her these things too? The many nights we had sex, unprotected sex. Did he use protection with her? How could he be so selfish? Did he not think I would find out? Did he not think that this would hurt my feelings? Did he care if he hurt my feelings? The more I thought about this situation the more I felt so low. I felt so low, and so used.

I went back to my apartment, and he was gone. Reality came crashing in, and I realized I was alone again. Although I was hurting, I wondered if he was okay. I really shouldn't care, but I did. I loved him, and although he hurt me, I did not want him out on the street. I was hurting, but I missed him. That night I cried and cried. I wanted answers. I had to know why, and was he sorry? At that moment I had already forgiven him, I just wanted him to be sorry. I wanted him to see how he continued to hurt me over and over again. I wanted him to see how I loved him. Wasn't my love good enough for him? Wasn't I pretty enough? Wasn't I smart enough? I had done everything I could to please him, and yet I could not make him happy.

He called me later that night and asked if we could talk. Ironically, he was in Keaton's room. Once Mark realized Keaton told me about Jessica, he bashed him. He stopped speaking to him and stopped being his friend. Now a couple of months later, Keaton was the individual who took him in. Where were his faithful and loyal fraternity brothers? The same fraternity brothers who would drink with him, party with him, and use the fact that they were in a fraternity to get with women, where were they? As I look at a person who had so much regret, I could not deny I loved him and I still wanted him in my life. Mark came back to my apartment and we talked. Well, he talked and I cried. That night as he held me I cried myself to sleep. At that time, I would rather hurt and be with him, then to hurt and be alone.

That summer we ended our dysfunctional relationship at least three or four times. Some days were good, and some days were not. Although Jessica and I knew the truth, we continued to hold bitter feelings towards each other. She

would call me often, and many times, I could tell the conversation was directed towards him. There were many moments like these, and Mark was the one who felt my hurt. Mark tried to make it up to me by buying me gifts, apologizing, or whatever he could do to make me happy. I am sure he was remorseful, but I was tired. I would make him leave my apartment, and later on that night, I would allow him to come back. Although we were intimate at that time, it was difficult for me. Every time we were intimate, the only thing I could think about was Mark and Jessica. Was he comparing me to her? Did I satisfy him? Did he miss being with her?

What about your friends?

Every now and then I get a little crazy
That's not the way it's supposed to be
Sometimes my vision is a little hazy
I can't tell who I should trust or just who I let trust me (yeah)

People try to say I act a little funny
But that's just a figure of speech to me
They tell me I changed because I got money
But if you were there before then you're still down with me

What about your friends? will they stand their ground?
Will they let you down again?
What about your friends are they gonna be low down
Will they ever be around or will they turn their backs on you

Well is it me or can it be I'm a little too
Friendly so to speak hypothetically
Say I supply creativity to what others
Must take as a form of self-hate
Only to make an enemy
Which results in unfortunate destiny
They dog me out then be next to me

Just cause I am what some choose to envy

Every now and then I get a little easy

I let a lot of people depend on me

I never thought they would ever deceive me

Don't you know when times got rough I was standing on my own

I'll never let another get that close to me

You see I've grown a lot smarter now

Sometimes you have to choose and then you'll see

If your friend is true they'll be there with you

Through the thick and thin

(TLC, 1992, track 7).

Narrative Background: The following narrative exposes my ignorance regarding my own ethnicity and cultural background. I explored this aspect through my involvement in Greek life which represented a shift in my perception of education. This period also presented unforeseen challenges in regards to my relationships with my sorority sisters.

The summer was over, and it the fall of 2001. I became heavily involved in various campus activities. Being involved in campus activities sparked my passion for higher education and student affairs. I was a member of my sorority, resident assistant, a McNair scholar, and other extra-curricular activities kept me busy. I loved being involved on campus, and it was a great way for me to meet people. Being involved helped develop my leadership skills and my confidence.

That fall semester I was chosen as my sorority's homecoming representative. Running for homecoming queen was a challenge, but I had the support of my sorority sisters behind me. There were some nights we had to chalk the sidewalk, hang flyers, decorate cups, and each time my sorority sisters were there with me. I attended a predominately-white university with a student population over 20,000 students. Although we did not have much, we had something, and that was ambition and personality. I could talk to anyone and I knew almost everyone on the campus. I was running against twenty other candidates who would make excellent representatives for the school as well. However, it was in God's plan, and I was crowned Homecoming Queen! Not only was it an accomplishment for my sorority, but for the other African-American students as well. Being chosen by my student body as the representative of their

school was a great honor. The day I was crowned my sorority sisters were crying, my friends were happy, faculty and staff that knew me were cheering for my victory, and Mark was there with his fraternity brothers.

It was the fall of 2002 and finally my last year enrolled as an undergrad! Since I had to change my major, I had to remain in school another year. That fall semester I became the president of my sorority, deeply involved in Greek life, and active in other student activities. Greek Life was truly a life of its own. Greek Life has its positives, but there was a balance to everything. There were many nights of partying, drinking, and more partying. I was at a party at least twice a week. My major concern during that time was not graduating, but what outfit I would wear to the next party. At the time, I was still a nice person, but I became more concerned about my appearance and people's opinions. I was always seeking people's affirmation, but now it had taken a life of its own. People were always watching me and judging me. I always presented myself in a nice manner. However, people had greater expectations for me now I was a member of a sorority, my boyfriend was in a fraternity, and I was Miss MTSU. I wanted to meet others expectations, but sometimes I felt like I would break.

During this time, Mark was preparing for law school. He was interested in enrolling in a J.D-Ph.D program. Mark had wanted to be an attorney, but he wanted to teach as well so he decided to pursue both. It provided the perfect balance for him. Although he was ambitious and believed in justice, there was another side that was caring and desired to empower others through education.

In addition, Mark wanted a family and he wanted to be a father. He didn't want his time consumed with cases, but to be focused on his family. He was taking his GRE and LSAT and was always studying. He was a disciplined person, and if it required hours of studying he would put in the time. The nights he would visit me were spent studying or deciding on the law school he would attend. I did not mind his studying, because I knew that this was something he really wanted. That fall semester Mark graduated, and he moved back home. During the spring, we had a long distance relationship, but we were only 45 minutes apart. He would visit me every weekend patiently awaiting his acceptance letters. I distinctly remember when the acceptance letters start pouring in. You would have thought I was accepted into law school. He did not have to brag, because I did the bragging for him. I was so excited that he was blessed with so many choices. When he decided to attend a university 45 minutes away I was so relieved. If he would have chosen a law school far away I would have respected his decision, but I knew our relationship could possibly end.

While Mark was concerned with law school, I had sorority matters to deal with. The past fall semester a division occurred amongst my sorority sisters. I knew we all had problems, but I attributed this to class, the anticipation of graduation, and sorority work. I thought the problems that occurred were petty, and I will admit that we all played equal roles in the pettiness. Although we had problems, I thought we could resolve these issues. I thought we viewed each other as real sisters. I considered my sorority sisters to be my family. My real sisters and I could have an intense argument, and 20 minutes later go to the mall as if nothing happened. I had this same expectation for my sorority sisters.

Being involved in various student activities exposed me to many people, well everyone. I never considered myself better than other people, so my personality usually clicked with people others would consider weird, lame, or on the outsider. You were considered popular if you carried a Louie or Coach purse, drove a nice car, Greek, good looking, and had money. If you did not fit into the categories listed above, you were not considered popular. The people others considered beneath them were the same people I considered as friends and associates. Since I was known, this can be a good thing as well as a negative thing. Some of my sorority sisters felt I was always in the spotlight.

While I was active in Greek life, I noticed that the black Greek organizations had many problems, and we were not functioning as a unit. Becoming a member of my sorority was a great thing because it exposed me to an area I had little knowledge about and that was black history. It was sad to say, but I will say it, I like many other black students attend college and leave with little or no knowledge regarding black history. We can blame the institution, but I must take responsibility for my education. My school offered the courses, had the faculty, organizations, but I never considered it important. Funny, how could I ever say my history wasn't important! Like many of my peers, we were no longer concerned with the Civil Rights Movement, the psychological issues Black people dealt with because of slavery, or the societal issues Black people were dealing with in the present society. We were concerned with graduating so we could purchase our house, buy our Lexus, and move out the hood we were ashamed to tell our friends about because we knew they would judge us. We were concerned with ourselves, not concerned about the brothers and sisters who were in class

with us, or the sister who needed someone to talk to and not criticize her. No, we were concerned with “getting mine.”

Well, I never considered myself a material person, but I was ignorant. I recalled seeing injustices in my school, and I was one of the few individuals who addressed the administration. When something negative occurred, my peers and I took action. Addressing problems without proposing solutions or follow-up was in vain. I noticed this was a problem with my peers. Many times we wanted to blame the administration for our problems. Yes, my school had problems, but it was up to the students to hold them accountable. Progress is a steady motion, and only occurs when there was accountability. I slowly realized the problems our Greek organizations were encountering were not the problems of the institution. We had problems we needed to address as a community, before we could truly be effective on our campus.

We were not effective on my campus because we tried in various ways to sabotage each other. There were four black Greek sororities on my campus, and four black Greek fraternities on my campus. True we had different colors, different symbols, different names, but we all had one common purpose. Our purpose was to promote and uplift the black community. How were we uplifting the black community when we constantly spoke negativity towards each other with some of those incidences resulting in physical altercations? The only time we could unite was when an injustice occurred, but the next day we were back to our childish antics. I looked at our problems, and decided to come up with solutions. I proposed a retreat to the organizations. A retreat that would address the issues we had, and develop solutions to our problems.

I pitched the idea to my friend and my fraternity brother, Joseph. Joseph was a member of Mark's fraternity, and he was the advisor to all the Black Greeks. Joseph was a great leader, and under his leadership, the black Greeks were making progress. We proposed the idea to the organizations, and people were hesitant. Some of the hesitation came because we knew it was a good idea, but did we want to work together? No one had ever place the expectation on us to do much, so why start now. Let's not forget many of us they did not speak to each other because we belonged to different Greek organizations. We finally saw our pettiness, and decided to try it. The tasks were divided among the different organizations, and we started planning.

Joseph, Jennifer, and I coordinated the major planning. Jennifer was a member of another sorority. Jennifer and I had some arguments in the past, so we were working on shaky ground. However, the more we worked together the more we realized how much we had in common. Working on the retreat gave me an opportunity to build a friendship with Jennifer and other people as well. Some people thought that I was unapproachable and cocky. However when they got a chance to know me they realized I was a confidant person. Although internally I was dealing with many issues, on the outside I was confidant. I had preconceived notions about individuals as well, and it forced me to see how I was placing judgments on people because they belonged to another organization. How could I be so petty?

The retreat was a success! It was a tiring event, but I was ecstatic we were able to unite to do something positive. So many times people only see the negative aspects of Greek life. However, we were trying to take the steps in the

right direction. We realized we were ignorant regarding our true purpose, and we were going to take the initiative to reach our potential.

Although I was busy coordinating various activities, I had a great deal of fun. Well, for the exception of one night. The last night of the retreat, we had a banquet. I was stating how I was grateful that my peers and I united for this cause, and grateful to Joseph for his help. Actually, I said I considered Joseph like a best friend because we were together so much, and well Mark was in the audience. It was joke, and everyone laughed except for Mark. After the banquet was over, Mark and I had a huge argument. He stated I was taking him for granted and our relationship was not a priority in my life. I couldn't believe he was saying these things.

Yes, we were both busy with various things, but I always made time for him. I tried to be understanding, but I couldn't understand where all of this was coming from. I would do anything I could to make sure he knew he was the priority in my life. While my peers were attending the party held the last night of the retreat, I was in the room with Mark. The next day I was supposed to ride the charter bus with Joseph and the rest of my peers, since I was the coordinator. However, I rode back home with Mark because I wanted him to know he was a priority. I felt horrible because I felt that I was placing all the responsibility on Joseph. I wondered to myself, would Mark do this for me? Not ready to deal with the true answer, I placed my focus on Mark. On our way back home, we discussed his plans for graduate school, his internship, and his plans for the future.

Due to my over-involvement in Greek life, partying, and keeping my mind occupied with petty matters, I had a fall semester GPA of a 2.4. In order to be

active in my sorority we had to have a semester GPA of 2.5, and I had a 2.4. Until this semester, I always maintained a semester GPA of at least a 3.2 regardless of my course. My coursework wasn't terribly overwhelming; I was just doing too much. Well, I was doing everything but the right thing. One of my other sorority sisters was below the required GPA as well. When my graduate advisor inquired about the GPAs for that semester I told her everyone met the requirement. We only eight members in the chapter, and if I and my other sorority sister were placed on the probation my chapter would be placed on probation as well. I knew it was wrong for me to lie to my graduate advisor, but I thought it was justified.

The tensions began to rise and rise in my sorority. Towards the end of the spring semester, things finally exploded. It was our sorority's spring week of events. We had a flyer published with our week of events. We had a professional photographer take pictures for the flyer. I was not able to attend the photo shoot because I was working on an event for the sorority. I saw the first draft of the flyer, and I was immediately hurt. I was up to four o'clock in the morning working on a sorority event that night, and people who could barely attend meetings or events made sure they were present for this photo. Our week was our official ending to our undergraduate lives and they wanted to be apart of that memory. Well I felt the exact same way. My sorority sisters and I who were not present at the original shoot decided to take pictures on a later date. A second version of the flyer was published. This version of the flyer included pictures of everyone and an individual picture of Ashley, a chapter member that rarely participated was removed and replaced with another picture. I was the person who authorized this change, and my sisters who were against me were furious.

I received a call from Ashley and she was furious. She had every right to be upset, and I apologized. She thought that I had malicious intent, and she had a reason to feel that way. It was a bad decision on my part, and I was truly sorry. I apologized because it was not my intention to hurt Ashley's feelings. I think Ashley would have accepted the apology, but there were other individuals feeding her anger. I thought the issue with the flyer was blown totally out of proportion. Over half of the events on the flyer were not organized and we were arguing over a flyer. I was so tired of the arguing with my sorority sisters every other day, so I was going to resign from my position. I had two weeks left of my senior year, and I did not want to spend this time depressed over sorority matters. I had every intent to resign, but Pam convinced me to remain in my position. I knew that we had our week of events coming, and with the exception of Pam and Sara, I was the only one who knew the details regarding each event. I felt it would be unfair to lay this burden on Pam and Sara so I decided to put my emotions aside.

I thought the situation would blow over, but it did not. It was Monday, April 14th and the chapter called an impromptu meeting. My sorority sisters who had the major problem with me were the ones who called this meeting, one of those individuals being Kimberly.

“Meka we think you have gone too far.” Kimberly responded.

“Right...who gave you the power to remove Ashley's picture? Cybil asked angrily.

“Okay I understand what I did was wrong and I apologized to Ashley. Look Ashley like I said before, it was a poor decision on my part and I'm sorry.”

“Whatever, that’s some bullshit. You think you this sorority.” Ashley replied heatedly.

“I don’t think I’m the sorority.” I respond defensively.

“Yes you do! You always in the spotlight. You always seen. It’s always about you.” Cybil retorted avidly.

They continued to address various issues regarding me and my behavior. I listened to their comments, and on some matters, I could understand their point of view. In some ways, I could understand how they felt excluded or their feelings were not taken into consideration. Those were legitimate concerns, and issues I had to address within myself. I was open to their criticism, but it became difficult for me to accept responsibility for actions that they were guilty of as well. So as they continued on their rant I began to wonder, what is the real issue here? The main topic they kept driving home was that I received too much attention.

“Okay well I understand. Like I said before I’m sorry.” I responded calmly.

“Whatever you ain’t sorry. Bitch I know you ain’t sorry” Ashley replied strongly.

I quickly realized my apology was in vain. No matter what I said, they were not going to accept my apology. They were not seeking to make amends or rectify this situation. Ashley was hurt, and was not ready to end this dispute. She continued to address her dislike for me and cursing. As her sorority sister, I was angered she would call me out of my name.

“Look Ashley I understand you are upset but there’s no need to call me out of my name.”

“Bitch I can call you whatever I want to. You are a bitch. You a bitch and that’s what it is.” Ashley retorted vehemently.

“Look there’s really no need for that Ashley.” I responded angrily.

“Whatever Bitch what you going to do.” Ashley replied.

“Look all I’m asking is that you don’t call me a bitch again.”

“Like I said bitch. You know what fuck this bullshit I’m about to slap this bitch.” Ashley replied indignantly.

At this point, I was fed up with the whole matter. I was not going to allow Ashley to disrespect me. I knew we were about to fight, and to be honest Ashley would have won. I did not care if she would win; I was tired of allowing people to take my kindness for granted. Pam and Sara saw me lunging towards Ashley and they held me back. In the heat of the moment, I finally realized what had just happened. I have been in one fight in my life, and that was during my childhood. I was an adult, and most importantly a lady. Yet, here I was about to fight not an enemy, but my sorority sister. The individual who I had always vowed to respect and love was now threatening to hit me.

“Shemika you don’t deserve this let’s go.” Sara said while crying.

“You know what you can have this. I resign” I said as I exited the building. As I looked in the corner, before I walked through the doors, I could see Kimberly and Sybil smiling shamelessly.

The next day I called my graduate advisor, and told her I was resigning from my position. She told me Sybil had called the day before and requested my impeachment. I only had two weeks in office, and they were trying to impeach me! My sorority sisters gave my graduate advisor the reasons for my

impeachment; however, she would not grant their request. In her eyes, I had carried out my tasks and responsibilities as the president. Once they saw that this would not work, they researched other methods regarding my removal. They researched my GPA. They found out my GPA did not meet the requirement; therefore I could not serve as the president.

When she told me this, I was so hurt. I knew my sorority sisters were upset with me, but to go to such lengths to remove me from my position was only revelation. I apologized to my graduate advisor for lying, and she forgave me. She encouraged me to remain in my position, but I was finished with my sorority. If they wanted it, they could have it. They could have the meetings, the late night planning, running around town on their own gas money, speaking to people who constantly had attitudes; they could have all of that. Instead of judging me, my graduate advisor gave me wisdom. She taught me sometimes you have to learn things in life, and you have to learn them the hard way. When you learn things the hard way, you will never make that mistake again. She was right. I had to learn the hard way that I put my integrity on the line, and never again would I make this same mistake.

That night I called Mark, and he was very upset. Mark was not shocked by my sorority sisters' actions. He was hurt that I was hurt. You see those nights while he was studying I was usually working on things for my sorority. Those nights when he wanted to go to dinner, I had sorority meetings. Those nights when he came to visit me and spend time with me, I was on the phone listening to one of my sorority sisters' problems.

My sorority sisters Sara, Pam, Natalie, and Casey were there for support. Until you are down, and there is nothing you can offer a person, this is when you realize who truly is your friend. I was coming to this point, and I finally realized whom my real friends were, and who had a title of being my sorority sister. My sorority sisters who supported me, and have always supported me had an unconditional love for me. I appreciated their support, but I knew that I would never view my sorority in the same light. That event totally changed my view on sororities and my relationship with women.

Outside

It's hard to explain
Inherently it's just always been strange
Neither here nor there
Always somewhat out of place everywhere
Ambiguous
Without a sense of belonging to touch
Somewhere halfway
Feeling there's no one completely the same

Standing alone
Eager to just
Believe it's good enough to be what
You really are
But in your heart
Uncertainty forever lies
And you'll always be
Somewhere on the
Outside

Early on, you face
The realization you don't have a space
Where you fit in
And recognize you
Were born to exist

And it's hard
And it's hard
And it's hard

Irreversibly
Falling in between

And it's hard
And it's hard
To be understood
As you are
As you are
Oh, and God knows
That you're standing on your own
Blind and unguided
Into a world divided
You're thrown
Where you're never quite the same
Although you try - try and try
To tell yourself
You really are
But in your heart - uncertainty forever lies
And you'll always be
Somewhere on the outside
You'll always be
Somewhere on the outside
(Carey, 1997, track 12)

Narrative Background: This narrative depicts the many emotions and thoughts I considered because of my rejection from my sorority. The narrative presents the contentions I could not understand, because although I had a support system outside the sorority, I still felt alone.

I once heard that when you are up, it all comes down. I guess that truth has some relevance in my life. The situation with my sorority sisters had taken on a life of its own. My sorority's week was finally here. I did not attend any events. I felt it was best because I had no desire to attend any events. Second, it will only make the situation worst. I knew people would be talking and my presence would only spark more conversation and more drama. Well I did go to one event. One of my favorite authors, TJ Butler was there. I had worked hard with our Director of Multicultural Affairs to bring her to the university. She came to discuss her book sorority sisters, and give a workshop on sisterhood.

How ironic!

In any case, the week came and went. I functioned, but inside my heart was broken. I stayed in my bed for a couple of days. At that time, I was working at a retail store, but I had to quit. I could not work, and I could not attend class. I wasn't ashamed to show my face because of my actions. I had made a mistake, and I had learned from it. You have to accept things and move on. I was ashamed because for so long I thought so highly of my sorority. When the school needed someone from my sorority, I was proud to represent with my letters. I knew what those letters meant, and I respected them highly. When I met other interested

women, I did not act as if I was better than they were. I would tell them about my sorority, and if anything encourage them to follow their heart's desires. In the beginning when I first became a member I, acted silly towards some girls, but God eventually put me back in check quickly! When individuals or other Greeks would come to me asking about my sorority, I could tell them all the great things about my organization. I was not saying these things because it sound good, but because I truly believed those words in my heart.

However, I could not say those things now. I try to be genuine. People who know my personality know that it was very hard for me to disguise my true emotions. When people came and asked me about the situation, and they did, they could see that I was hurt. In the beginning, I acted very childish about the situation. I was hurt. When individuals would say negative things regarding my sorority, I did not disagree with them. Eventually I realized this was wrong, and I was putting my sorority in a negative light. However, this same sorority discarded me.

Parting ways with my sorority sisters was like parting ways with my family. When your family turns their back on you, it hurts you. My sorority sisters in my eyes were my family. There were many times I put my sorority before my family. I treated my sorority sisters better than I treated my own family. I barely remembered my real sister's birthday. However, I knew every one of my sorority sister's birthdays, and if I had the money I would make sure, I would get her something. If there was something my sorority sister needed and I had it, it was hers. If one of my sorority sisters did not have the best clothes, shoes, etc. instead of talking about her I would give her my clothes. I did not believe in me

looking good, and my sorority sister was not looking her best. When events would happen in my real sisters' lives, I wouldn't get very excited. However, I was there for the special moments for my sorority sisters. I remember how my family came to visit me when I was crowned for homecoming queen. I spent more time with my sorority sisters than my family. Tracey was hurt, and stated that I cared more about my sorority sisters than her. In some ways, I guess she was right.

A bright day in the midst of this storm was my graduation day. I remember this day was one of the brightest days during this gloomy period in my life. My mom, dad, sisters, brothers, and my aunt came to my graduation. As usual they came late, but it did not matter I was happy they were there. They came late, and left early. Sounds like church, huh? They complained that the ceremony was too long, and they had to go to the mall before they got back on the road. After the graduation, I sang my sorority hymn and I left with Mark. My parents were in their hotel room waiting to see me. Mark and I went to visit my family in the hotel room, and as usual, it was a good laugh.

"Whew that ceremony was long. I didn't ever think they was going to say your name." My dad had no qualms about expressing his discontent.

"I know that ceremony took forever." Rosalyn agreeing with my father.

"But I thought you guys left early" I asked trying to understand why they were annoyed.

"We did. As soon as you walked we got on down. I wanted to go to the mall." Tracey replied.

"Yeah you know Tracey can't seem to stay out those stores" my mom chimed in.

“Well I think it’s time we get back on the road.” My dad stated firmly.

“Back on the road? You guys just got here this morning. It’s only 1:30 p.m.” I stated disappointed by their impending departure.

“Yeah but you know Momma and Daddy got to make a stop every 20 minutes so we won’t make it home until 10:00p.m.” Rosalyn replied.

I understood, and was happy they had made the trip to support me. Where my family lacked Mark was more than willing to step in and make sure I had the full graduation experience. I was tired from the long morning so he allowed me to sleep. When I finally awoken later in the evening, he told me to get dress we were going out. We had the standard date a dinner and a movie. I loved it because I was for sure that I wasn't going to have a graduation dinner. As usual, he was able to find a way to make me laugh and forget about the worries for a moment. With Mark, I was able to experience happiness again, but happiness always ended on Sunday when he had to go home. Sundays evenings were the worst because now I was alone, again.

That summer I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work in the Office of Multicultural Affairs. That summer I was very unsure about my life. I had a bachelor degree in Business and Education. I was not sure what I wanted to do in the business field and I knew I did not want to teach. I was in the process of preparing for graduate school in the fall. Since I received my bachelor in Business Education, I considered obtaining a Master in Business Education. On the other hand, I knew I did not have a passion for this area. I spoke with my boss, and he suggested me considering pursuing a career in student affairs. He gave me the limitless opportunities that I would have in this area, and he knew my passion for

this area of higher education. After careful consideration, I knew that pursuing a career in student affairs was for me. Working with my boss that summer was a great opportunity for me to develop my professional skills and my personal skills. That summer I had to work with various personalities. This was good for me because it taught me how to be more accommodating to other people's personality instead of being inflexible.

While I was working that summer, I met Lena a prospective graduate student. Lena was a graduate of Miami University. She came to visit my university because she was interested in pursuing a Master in Education. She was looking to pursue a career in student affairs as well. Her parents were friends with my boss. She had a meeting with my boss to discuss her prospects of getting a graduate assistantship, enrolling in the program, and she had less than a couple of weeks to do this. My boss asked me to attend this meeting as well. When we met, we hit it off immediately. She was determined, goal-oriented, and very feisty! She and I quickly realized we had many characteristics in common. We share many of the same personal characteristics, both active in Greek life during our undergraduate period, we were both #9's on our lines, and we were both once presidents of our sorority. The only difference was she was a member of another sorority. She loved the colors crimson and ivory, and her apartment covered with elephants. We kept in touch that summer, and I was happy when I found that she would be attending graduate school with me in the fall.

Although I developed friendships with other people, I spent a great deal of time alone during this time. I would think and think. I replayed the events repeatedly in my mind. I was upset with myself because I should have known this

was going to happen. The fact that I did not see it coming made me feel as if I did not have control over the situation. The signs were there and I did not take the time to see them. I could only see what I wanted to see. I should have known this would happen when I considered my friendships with some of my sorority sisters. I should have noticed how some of sorority sisters would discuss one of my sorority sisters, and later act as if everything was okay. I'm not going to act as if I did not participate in these conversations because I did. If they were talking about another person, what made me any different? Another mistake I made was placing high expectations on my sorority sisters. I should have known that not everyone joined the sorority for sisterhood. To expect that I would have a true sisterly bond was a mistake on my part.

I considered the criticisms they stated about my character. I understood how they felt excluded them from certain decisions. However, as a leader you cannot call a meeting every time you make a decision. I had to consider this weakness, and correct it. They accused me of not trusting their ability to get things done when needed. I could understand their feelings on this issue. It wasn't that I did not trust their abilities to get things done. When I do anything, I always put my best effort forward. If I cannot do something right, I will not do it at all. I know there were times when my sorority sisters had put in half-effort attempts when doing things. Instead of correcting them, I should have allowed them to see their mistake.

I could see my weaknesses as a leader, and as a sister. I had to address my character flaws I shared with my sorority sisters. I had to call myself the characteristics I portrayed. I was petty, I gossiped, sometimes I was insensitive to

other people, and controlling. Although I felt my sorority sisters were contradicting themselves for criticizing me for doing the same things they were doing, I had to realize something. I had to admit the flaws I possessed, and address them. I could admit those things, but was it enough for them to hate me? It was one thing to be in strife with someone, and knowing that someone hates you. Knowing that someone hates you and there was no resolution was a troubling feeling to have on your heart. Where did this hate develop and how did it develop? These were the questions burning in my mind. Someone had to answer them.

That someone was usually me. The more I thought about the situation, the more depressed I became. Regardless of what happened, I love them. Could they not see that I needed their presence in my life? Some people are good at letting you know that they do not need you and they do not miss your presence. I'm not one of those people. I shared so much of my life with them, and now I was nothing to them. How do you go from having so much love for an individual, to the extreme of hating them?

These thoughts kept me entrapped in a pit that I could not climb out of and I did not know if I wanted to come out. Mark was the one who felt this pain. I think it is ironic how someone hurts you, but your loved ones have the privilege of feeling that pain. This was my boyfriend. He was the one who heard the questions and heard the silence. He would come and visit and I wasn't the most pleasant company.

“Hey let's do something” Mark stated cheerfully.

“What you want to do” I responded sadly.

“Anything... you need to get out of this apartment” Mark stated with concern.

“I’m tired. Go hang out with your fraternity brothers and we can do something later.”

I began to sleep a lot and I cried all the time. Mark was very understanding. I guess he knew he would be hurt if his fraternity brothers had done this same thing to him. No matter how understanding Mark was, he could not reach me. I was so dependent on Mark because I felt that he was my only true friend. I knew if I needed a shoulder to cry on, a push in the right direction, or money for rent I knew my Mark was going to be there. Mark had to take the place of my sorority sisters, my family, and still be my boyfriend. I knew I was placing pressure on him, but I didn’t have anyone else. In my mind, it was just us. This was the summer before his first year of law school. We should be spending time enjoying each other’s company, traveling, and having fun. However, he is spending his time watching me fall apart.

My family noticed the difference in me as well. I went to visit my family for July 4, and Mark was with me. My family noticed I had gained weight, and they made sure that I knew they knew. I knew I had gained weight, and I was back in the gym again. Tracey noticed a difference in my attitude. I wasn't cheerful and she told me I lost my spark. On the trip back home, Mark asked if we could talk.

“What’s on your mind” I asked inquiringly.

“I want you to do a personality assessment.” Mark stated with some concern.

“A personality assessment” I stated with a confused look on my face.

“Yes a personality assessment. What do you think about your family’s comments?”

“I mean I know I’ve gained weight. No one needs to tell me that. I’m always the first to know that. I’m working really hard to lose weight, but it just seems different this time.” I responded indicating my feelings of hopelessness.

“And your thoughts on Tracey’s comments” Mark asked.

“Okay I guess I have lost my spunk. Where are you going with this” I replied curiously.

“I mean Shemika when I met you...you were driven. That’s the quality I always loved about you. No matter what was going on you never allowed anyone or anything to stand in your way, but it seems like right now you’re letting yourself go” Mark answered in a caring matter.

“I let myself go?” I responded defensively.

Mark took a deep breath. He was trying to pay attention to the road and have this difficult conversation. “I mean Shemika I don’t like your personality right now. I’m sorry I do not. It’s depressing. You’re sad all the time and it’s hard being around you. You know I love you, and remember we said that if either of us were ever headed in the wrong direction we would intervene. I’m intervening and telling you that you’re headed down the wrong path”.

“Hmmm” I responded with deep hurt.

Fearing that he had gone too far, Mark asked “What do you think?” I didn’t respond to his question. I had no intention of responding or talking to him for the remainder of the trip. I was hurt. I was really hurt. It was just too much in one

day. Too much of everything I'm doing wrong. What can I do right? I knew he cared about me but his insight only reiterated the thoughts I had at the moment.

“See Shemika, this is what I'm talking about.” Mark responded in frustration. “I mean you get upset with me when I don't voice my feelings and thoughts. Yet this is the reason why. When I try to communicate with you, and you disagree with my perspective you give me the silent treatment. You know that hurts me more than anything Shemika. I'm not trying to hurt you and I'm not the bad guy.”

I knew I hurt his feelings. I knew Mark was trying to help me, and I knew Mark was right. I was scared. I was scared that for once in my life I couldn't bring myself out. I couldn't be what everybody needed or wanted me to be. I didn't know how and I didn't have the motivation to do it. Unlike the other times in my life, I was down, and I knew I could not bring myself out of this.

Sometimes it takes a fall for you to realize how you cannot make it on your own. I was beginning to realize this. I began to read the bible more guidance and take more of an active interest in spirituality. Something was missing in my life, and I conclude that something was God. I knew everything happened for a reason, and I finally realized God had the answers. All the questions I was asking myself were questions only God could answer. On Thursday nights, many of the college students attended bible study held at a local church by a man named Bishop Walker. I distinctly remembered a special Thursday during that summer. I decided to attend bible study that night and I was going to attend with one of my friends. My friend was supposed to attend, but as usual something came up and she could not attend. I had a choice to make. I could go alone or wait until

next week and go with my friend. I wanted to go, but I was afraid. I was afraid to attend because I hadn't been in church in months and I was afraid of what people would think. I didn't know these people, but I was afraid of them. I thought they could probably see my sin before I made it through the door and judge me accordingly. I decided it was time for me to do this by myself and not depend on another individual. I went to the bible study that night, and that night changed my life forever.

Emotional Rollercoaster

Last night I cried tossed and turned, woke up with dry eyes.
My mind was racing, feet were pacing.
Lord help me please tell me what have I gotten into.
Ran my 3 miles to clear my mind, it always helps me out,
it's my therapy when I'm losing it which is usually.

I'm on an emotional rollercoaster.
Loving you aint nothing healthy.
Loving you was never good for me.
But I can't get off.

Yesterday I told myself I was gonna be okay.
Gonna start a new day be truly happy.
I was gonna take control of me.
But eventually reality hit me.
Mentally, physically, emotionally.
And I opened my eyes and realized
that I was still being taken for a constant ride oh no

So tired of you making love to me, then disappearing so suddenly.
Up and down we go.
And I'm so tired of you pacifying me
with promises you know that you'll never keep.
Round and round we go.

I'm on an emotional rollercoaster loving you was never healthy
loving you was never good for me but i can't get off.

(Green, 2003, track 6).

Narrative Background: The following narrative details my experience in graduate school, changes in my relationship with Mark, and my inability to effectively cope with the disconnected friendships.

The days of summer were now gone, and I was embarking on a new phase in my life. I was now enrolled in graduate school, and seeking to build my career. My mindset had changed, and it was different because of many reasons. Now that I was in graduate school, I knew I had to apply myself academically. I was very disappointed with my undergraduate performance. Unlike in high school where I graduated eighth in my class and received many honors, I graduated with a 3.025. No academic honors earned and no academic awards. I hadn't earned them because I placed my academics second place to my sorority or my personal life. I could have excelled as an undergraduate, but I was very immature. I was excited to see what my academic potential could be because I knew I had not met it. I was determined to graduate with my Masters with a GPA no less than a 3.5. I had to give my best in graduate school because I was entering a very competitive job market. I had interest in earning my doctoral degree, and I knew my masters would be a determinant on where I would be doing my doctoral work.

Graduate school was different from undergraduate. I knew my performance in undergraduate was not my best because I was in the wrong field. I hated business, because it was so boring. I love to think and I enjoy a good mental challenge. I loved to read, write, and challenge the various theories we sometimes consider facts. I wasn't mentally challenged in my undergraduate courses, but graduate school was different. Instead of being required to memorize

a list of facts, I was now required to read, write, and analyze various thoughts. There was no right answer, and I loved hearing others opinions and seeing the passion people had for their beliefs.

I believe my focus also changed during this time because I began to develop a relationship with God. As I evaluated my past mistakes during my undergraduate period, I knew it was attributed to the absence of a real relationship with God. During that time I knew how to pray to God to receive what I wanted or what I needed. I knew how to get that prayer through when I needed money, when my boyfriend and I had unprotected sex, or when I needed a grade. Yes, I knew how to ask God to do something for me, but looking back, I had done nothing for God. The least he expected from me was intimacy and gratitude, but I couldn't give him that. Well I didn't need him for that. I had my boyfriend for intimacy and I was thankful my boyfriend was in my life. Ahh, yes I had a lot to learn.

Attending Mt. Zion was definitely in my destiny. I had never had a real experience with God. Growing up, I loved God, but church did not interest me. I saw all the protocols that you had to follow. You had to wear a dress, you had to speak in tongues, you had to catch the Holy Ghost and fall out, and some other man-made sanctions instituted in the church. Well what if I didn't have a nice dress. Did this mean I'm not worthy to be in the presence of God? What if I don't have the gift of tongues or even understand why people speak in tongues? If you come and lay your hand on me, and I don't get the Holy Ghost am I evil. These were my questions, and before I attended Mt. Zion, no one could answer them. It felt good to go a church where I could go and worship God although I may not

have the nicest dress! God wasn't interested if I had on the correct shade of stockings or if I could shout louder than my neighbor could. He wanted me to develop a relationship with him, a real relationship so he could finally teach me about love.

Through Mt. Zion and graduate school, I was fortunate to meet another young lady name Jackie. Jackie was from D.C. and we worked at the same department for our graduate assistantship. Jackie loved to do one thing, and that was talk! Jackie could talk, talk, and talk. Although she could talk, she was a great listener. Jackie and I had a great deal in common. Jackie and I had very similar childhoods. She had a tumultuous past, but she was a survivor. When I would listen to some of her life experiences, I could tell this woman was a survivor. Jackie was a beautiful young woman, classy, down to earth, and confident. I also had a chance to develop a friendship with another young lady and her name was Jada. Jada was a soror from Virginia, and she was in her second year of graduate school. Jada had the brightest smile, and was like pure sunshine. She always had a pleasant attitude, and always willing to listen. Jada inspired me because she was a woman truly after God's heart. That semester I had a chance to build friendships with these two women, as well as Lena.

I was trying to establish a life outside of my school because many of my sorority sisters were still in the same area or they went to school with me. I actually took classes with some of sorority sisters, and these were my sorority sisters who I had previous problems with in the past. I had decided to leave my past with my sorority behind, and focus on my future. I didn't attend of my sorority events, I no longer attended parties, and I was no longer involved in

Greek life. I remained friends with some of the people who were Greek, but our friendships existed because we shared something outside of Greek Life. Although the situation with my sorority sisters had occurred months ago, people were still talking about it. Many people noticed I had withdrawn myself from the social scene, and attributed this intimidation from my sorority sisters. My sorority sisters did not intimidate me. I felt the situation was behind me and speaking on the situation was only adding more wood to the fire. Being around them only brought back hurtful memories I was still dealing with.

While I was in graduate school, Mark was starting his first semester of law school. I was so proud of him, but I was also afraid. Although we were both still in school, we were in two different schools and we lived 30 minutes apart. The summer before law school, I talked with many of my male mentors who knew about my relationship. They all stated to me how it was important for me to be understanding and supportive of my boyfriend. Mark was going to be under intense pressure, and he was going to need someone he could depend on. I was told how I had to be the perfect woman, because this was what he would need. They also told me about the many women who would be interested in him because he was attending a prestigious graduate school and he would be a successful lawyer. I knew this was true, but I wasn't insecure. Mark had once mentioned I was the only woman he would marry without a pre-nuptial agreement. I was sure my boyfriend knew how much I loved him. Mark had taken me through the fire, to the limit, and to the wall. He knew I loved him when he had nothing, and he knew I loved him because there was something

great in him on the inside. Before any of his dreams had become realities, I was the one there. I was the one was there supporting him.

I was sure Mark knew these things, but I wanted to make sure that he never forgot these things as well. Some nights I would cook him dinner, and drive 40 minutes just to bring him dinner. I knew I wouldn't have a chance to see him because he was studying. I didn't care, and I understood. I wanted to make sure he knew I cared about him. Sometimes I would only see him on the weekend, and that time was limited. Many nights I would come to see him, but I would fall asleep because he was studying. Our time together continued to decrease, and I tried to understand. Sometimes I would want to spend time with him or go see a movie, but he had already gone with his law school classmates. At times, I felt he took me for granted, but I understood. The last thing I wanted to do was pressure him.

Although I was developing other friendships, I had my boyfriend, I had my church, and I was doing well in graduate schools I wanted to leave. I needed something different, and I was tired of my current school. I had made the successful transition as an undergraduate to a graduate, but I felt there was something more out there for me. I hate feeling complacent, and restricted. I felt my current environment restricted me, and it was time for me to move on. I was in the beginning of my Masters, and I could still transfer my hours to another school. I talked to my friends, my boyfriend, and my mentors and they thought the move was good. Notice, I did not say God. I had spoken with them, and I had decided to transfer to another school. I was determined that in the spring of 2004 I would be in a new place.

I was determined, and I applied to various schools. My main concern was not getting in, but ensuring my school was paid for entirely and gaining admission into a highly esteemed Student Affairs/Higher Education program. . I got a second job to make extra money for my move. I was fortunate to become a sales consultant for the largest computer company in the US. The job was different because it required me to utilize different techniques to sell the product, but I knew it would be a good experience. I was working 40-50 extra hours a week on top of my graduate assistantship. I did not mind because I had a goal insight, and I was determined to reach it.

My first choice was the University of Missouri, Columbia. I wanted to attend this school because it ranked in the top ten. I was accepted, but my financial package was still in the air. I decided to visit the school. My goals for the visit was to find an apartment, get money to attend school, and meet the faculty in my department. My visit proved to be unsuccessful. The faculty members in my department were great, but I could not attain any money. I went to every student affairs department, spoke with various staff members, and nothing happened. In order for me to attend this school, I would have to take out student loans and private loans. My apartment search proved fruitless as well. On my way back home, I knew that I wouldn't be attending school there in the spring.

Although my first choice did not come through, I was determined to transfer. I was accepted at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and the University of Memphis, but again no money to pay for school. My apartment was packed, and I was sure I was going to move. I told my mentors about the problems with school. I had to weigh my options. I could attend another

university, take out student loans, and add another year of school. However, if I remained enrolled in my current program, I would continue to go to school free and I would graduate in August. After careful consideration, and finally yielding to my will I knew I wouldn't be attending another school. I was a bit disappointed, but I had to believe that God knew what was best for me.

While I was making decision about school, I also had the chance to see Mark. Since we were both on Thanksgiving Break, we had the chance to spend more time together. We were spending more time together, but something was different. I knew we were growing apart, and I didn't know how to bridge the gap. I knew Mark felt the same way. I was annoyed because I was the one who always tried to keep the romance in our relationship. When our relationship ended the last time I was the one who wanted to get back together initially, not him. When we would spend time together, I would have to probe in order to find out what he was thinking, when in the past he would just tell me. If he wasn't talking to me, then whom was he talking to about his feelings?

Well I knew whom I was telling my feelings to, and it was not Mark. During my last year as an undergraduate, I met a young man name Adrian in one of my courses. Adrian was a really nice and genuine person. Adrian was the type of guy who was real and he knew who he was as a man. He was a hardworking young man. Adrian and I hit it off immediately and as the year progressed, we became great friends. Adrian knew I had a boyfriend, and he respected my relationship. If I needed someone to talk to, I could always talk to Adrian and I knew he would listen.

Since I was in graduate school, and he was finished with graduate school we didn't see each other very much. We always stayed in touch over the phone, but we hadn't seen each other in months. The day before Thanksgiving, we decide to meet and catch up on some things. He came over to my apartment, and I was very excited to see him. Adrian was a very handsome young man. He was tall, light-skinned, with beautiful skin. He was eye-candy, and I enjoyed flirting with him.

Well that day Adrian and I talked and talked and talked. We were in my bedroom watching videos, and laying in my bed. It felt nice to have someone to talk to, and laugh at my lame jokes. As usual, we were flirting with each other, very heavily, and there was no thought of Mark in my mind. He decided to leave because he knew Mark and I were traveling that evening for the Thanksgiving holiday. As we said our good-byes, Adrian took me in his arms and held me from the small of my back. Hugging him felt so nice, and when he walked out the door I begged him to come back in. We did this scenario for 10 minutes, and I enjoyed every second of it. As he walked away, I knew that Adrian and I were very much attracted to each other.

I packed my bags and picked up Mark to begin my long journey home for the Thanksgiving holiday. While Mark was in the car listening to some tape for law school, and reading the entire way, I drove the entire time thinking about Adrian. Thinking about the next time, I would see him and trying to control myself. I felt bad because here I was in a relationship with a man I truly loved, and I was fantasizing about another man. I knew I was attracted to Adrian, but I was in love with Mark. I had to see my selfishness, and take heed quickly before I

allowed a feeling to jeopardize my relationship and hurt someone I truly loved. I quickly put any notions about Adrian to a halt, but I could not help but think about my relationship with Mark.

As I reflected on my relationship that semester, I realized I did not like the direction our relationship was going. The only time I saw my boyfriend was late on Saturday night. I would spend the night, and the next morning we would leave to go to church. The funny thing was we never went to church together. During the past summer, my boyfriend would go to church but he never asked me to go with him. I'm not saying that he was responsible for my salvation, because wasn't. However, the few times I would go to church I would invite him to go with me. We now attended church on a regular basis, the same church, and we never went to church together. When I would question him, he would always say that he liked attending church with his guy friends. He felt church was his thing, and he did not want to share that with me.

In the beginning I understood, but the more I grew I thought his thinking was faulty. If I am your girlfriend, and you love me so much why would we go to praise the same God separately? I remember sometimes sitting in church alone, while he was sitting with his boys. Yes, I came to church to praise God, but the fact that the man I love was sitting two rows behind me and not beside me bothered me. I'm not trying to compare our relationship, but I knew his boys attended church with their girlfriends. Was he ashamed of me?

It also bothered me that I did not know anything about his life at law school. I did not know any of his friends, and none of his friends knew me. He knew all the main and supporting characters in my life, but I could not say the

same about him. I know he had various events during that semester, and he never invited me to those events. I remember he told he had a formal in the spring semester, and I asked him about the formal because I was interested in meeting his friends. He told me I could not attend because it was only open to law school students, and he could only invite someone from his class. My feelings were hurt, but I didn't want to make it a major issue. I tried to reassure myself that Mark was a private person, but I knew this was not true. I had involved him in every area of my life, but with him, I knew nothing. I hated thinking this way because I knew it made me insecure.

I went home for Christmas and Mark was with me. I talked to my Aunt Pat during the break about my willingness to move and my relationship with my boyfriend. She suggested that I move because there was so much for me to see and I was limiting myself. She questioned my relationship with Mark, and if there would be an engagement in the future. Actually, I hadn't thought about marriage, but I always considered Mark as my future husband. We had so much history, so much love, and he was my first. In my eyes, I could not see myself with another man, and I possessed an unconditional love for him.

After we came back home from Christmas things had not changed. We started to argue over the simplest things. I was provoking the arguments because I wanted him to communicate his feelings to me. One night on the phone, the argument ended. Mark suggested we break up, and I agreed. I didn't want to break up with Mark, but I felt it was needed. I hoped that maybe this would give him time to see how he had taken me for granted, and how much he needed me. Maybe it was really me hoping he would see how much I needed him.

I Try

I try to do
The best I can for you
But it seems it's not enough
And you know I care,
Even when you're not there.
But it not what you want.

You close your door,
when I wanna give you more.
And I feel, I feel so out of place.
And you know it's true,
Don't you think I'm, good enough for you.

Can't you see,
That you're hurting me,
And I want, I want this pain to stop.
So if you really care,
I mean if you really, really care,
Then open up your heart to me.
Open up to meeee....

You know that I tried to be with you.
You know that I wanted to see it through.
You know that I needed to make you mine.
It was only a matter of time.
(Bofill, 1979, Track 1).

Narrative Background: The following narrative describes my attempts to reconcile with Mark and my sorority sisters, and every attempt fell on deaf ears. Hence, the narrative exposed my feelings of self-worth and the deep, emotional pain I experienced.

I decided to remain in graduate school at my university, but I moved to another city. It was a 45-minute commute, but I needed to get away. I needed a change of scenery desperately, and I moved into an apartment by myself. I continued my job as a sales consultant for the computer company because I wanted the extra money, and I had my graduate assistantship. In a graduate program students usually take a class load of six hours, but I enrolled in 12 hours! I was determined to graduate in August, and that was my primary goal for this time.

Mark and I were still apart, but we were not apart. We talked every day, I saw him on the weekends, and everything was the same. The only difference was we were not in a relationship. I know you are thinking, was she repeating another chapter, but I'm not. Unfortunately, I was back in this pattern again where we were everything, but we were nothing.

One day Mark called because he missed me, and suggested that we see each other. He came to my apartment the next day, and so I cooked dinner for him. As usual, he spent the majority time studying while I cooked. I didn't mind because I was glad he was there. I missed him as well, and I was lonely. He went to my bedroom to study while I was washing dishes. I went to see him in my bedroom to get his attention but he was studying, deep in his studying. I don't think he was studying that hard, I think he was avoiding me. Mark knew me, and

knew I wanted to talk. I knew he wanted to avoid this conversation, and most do, but I was intent on talking that night. So I asked him the inevitable, when were we getting back together? He looked like a deer caught in headlights. The more I looked at him, the less he could look at me. He finally told me that he had not considered us getting back together. I was shocked. What do you mean you haven't considered? By this time, we had been apart for at least a month, and I knew I missed him. Had he not missed me? I asked him, why haven't you considered us getting back together, and he replied that he hadn't thought about it. What do you mean you haven't thought about it? We were together for five years, and now we are apart and you haven't thought about me. I didn't have to ask anymore questions, and I went into the living room. As I sat on my couch, I began to cry. I couldn't understand.

There were so many feelings running through my mind. The main thought was my ability to have feelings for this man who could never reciprocate them. When our relationship ended why did I always feel hurt, and he didn't. I remember sobbing in my dark living room, and listening to Alicia Keys cd Songs in A Minor. The cd moves to the track "Good-bye," and I heard the footsteps coming down the hallway. He looked at me, and I looked at him. I knew that he was leaving, and in the background I hear Alicia passionately sing, "*is this the end, are you sure, how should you know when you've never been here before its so hard to just let go when this was the one and only love I ever known.*" As the chorus slowly fades in, this was the question I wanted to ask him. Are you sure this was the end? However, I already knew the answers to these questions. I knew this was the end, and he was coming to say goodbye. Although I was

hurting, I wanted him to say he was sorry, he missed me, and how he had taken me for granted. As he embraced me with his masculine arms, I held on. I held on because I knew I would never hold him this way again. As he tried to break away, I held him tighter. He kissed me on my forehead, and told me he was sorry. He promised to call me that night, but as usual, he didn't call. As he drove away, I knew he had left physically, but he was present in my life.

I was hurt. No, I was beyond hurt, I was bitter. Yes, I was bitter, very bitter. I was bitter because this man told me he hadn't considered our relationship when we were together for five years. How do you throw away five years, and just move on? When we broke up it wasn't because of me, but because of him. In my eyes, this was unfair. Since he could easily throw our relationship to the side, I decided to do the same thing. It was obvious he was moving on with his life, and I had no part in his new life. He was starting anew, and I decided to do the same. As I looked at the pictures of us from his fraternity ball, the paddle he gave me with my sorority and his fraternity symbol, the stuffed animals, the post cards, the letter, the jewelry, everything in my sight was something that represented him. I packed the items in a box, sealed the box, and I mailed him the box filled with memories he no longer considered. Happy Valentine's Day!

The box wasn't the end of this act of vengeance. Again, I sent the same letters. Sometimes I wrote letters telling him I missed him. Sometimes I wrote letters telling him how much I hated him. I did not hate him. However, when you are hurt you want the person who hurt you to hurt as well. I would write letters discussing his weaknesses, and how his weaknesses led to the demise of our relationship. I would call him, but many times, he would not answer. I would

leave messages, and call him back five minutes later. I knew he knew it was me, and didn't want to talk to me. When he would return my call, which would be a couple of days later he didn't want to talk about our relationship. Many times, we would argue, and I wanted to argue. I had to know what thoughts were going through his mind, and why I wasn't one of them.

To take my mind off the situation with my ex-boyfriend, I poured myself into my career. I was graduating that summer, and it was suggested that I start applying for positions immediately. Looking back at that time there was no real way for me to work a full time position and take an overload of graduate school classes. However, I needed something I knew I was passionate about to pour myself into because my life felt so empty. The hurt was there when my sorority sisters left me, and that situation was steadily becoming worse. I could deal with the physical distance and emotional distance with Mark. Not having the opportunity to attend another school was another disappointment, but I had learned to get over that as well. Now Mark has left me and acted as if I didn't exist. This was a hurt I was not prepared to deal with yet. I know life was not easy, but was life always going to be hard. During that time, I could only see disappointment after disappointment.

I remained in contact with my sorority sisters who were my friends, but that was difficult. Either my sorority sisters were married, lived in another city, or they were in graduate school as well. I enjoyed talking to them over the phone and emailing, but I needed physical contact. I needed the camaraderie of the people who knew me, knew my past, and believed in me. Since they were not physically present, my friendships with Jada, Lena, and Jackie began to develop.

I took classes with them, we went to bible study and church together, the movies, and some nights we would have girls' night at my apartment. Girls' night usually consisted of us playing cards, talking, and our all-time favorite singing! Jackie, Jade, and I would reenact different songs, and Lena would watch because she didn't know the words or the songs. Sometimes it was El DeBarge, Janet Jackson, Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, Michael Jackson, if it was old school we knew it and we were singing it. Jada would be the lead singer most of the songs, Jackie would bring her high energy, and I brought the dance moves. Its funny but I knew the choreography of these songs and I was a child when I saw many of these videos. The girl nights out was fun and it was real. Up until this period, I thought it was hard for a female to be friends with another female. It was difficult because you were usually competing for the same man's attention, overwhelming insecurities, or you were too afraid to reveal the real you because of what people would think. With these women, it was different.

We were all from different backgrounds, different experiences, different opinions, but there was one thing we had in common. One thing we had a strong belief in, and we knew this was the foundation of our life and that was God. I remember in the past when situations would happen my past friends would offer petty or vindictive ways of handling things. I'm not blaming my actions on other people, but I can't be surprised that I act childish or vindictive when my friends were childish and vindictive. However, my relationship with God was teaching me how to approach life in a more mature fashion and learn to forgive. If there were times I needed someone to vent to I could talk to Jada. She would

encourage me, and pray for me. Sometimes my spirit would be so low, and Lena would be there to give me a pat on the back or the reassurance that God loves me.

I was truly grateful for my friendships with these women, but at the end of the day, I was going home alone. I was slipping into a depression. I hated the nighttime because it was the lonely time. I could put on my mask at work, on campus, and in my classes. I could find the good things to focus on, until I had to go home to a dark, empty, house. Just because we have a house or a place to live in it doesn't mean we have a home. Throughout my childhood sometimes, we lived in various dwellings, but I always had a home. The more I matured, the more I realized how I shortchanged my childhood. True there were fights, there were curse words, and pain. However, I had a home because no matter what went wrong, I always had someone else there. Although our electricity was off sometimes, and it was usually off a lot, it never seemed that bad. It wasn't that bad because in the candlelight I could always see my mom's beautiful smile when my dad would come home. Through the candlelight, I could see my older sister styling my younger sister's hair. Through the candlelight, I could see and feel the love. I had everything I needed material wise, but there was no love present in my house. No matter what we use to fill the space physically in our house, a house will remain empty if there is no love there to fill those spaces. My house was empty, and my heart was empty as well.

If Only U Knew

I must have rehearsed my lines
A thousand times
Until I had them memorized
But when I get up the nerve
To tell you, the words
Just never seem to come out right

If only you knew
How much I do
Do love you
If only you knew
How much I do
Do need you

I dream of moments we share
But you're not there
I'm living in a fantasy
'Cause you don't even suspect
Could prob'ly care less
About the changes I've been going through

No, you don't even suspect
Could prob'ly care less
About the changes I've been going through
(LaBelle, 1983, track 4)

Narrative Background: The following narrative describes the grief I experienced after my grandmother's death.

My Grandma Corine has been in and out the hospital since I have known her. She was always sick with something, and unfortunately, this was her life. So when my family told me she was in the hospital I was not alarmed. However, this time was different because my mother and sister were staying with her, and every other week she was in the hospital. Sometimes it was the flu, pneumonia, high blood pressure, but her condition was steadily growing worse. When my Grandma was in the hospital, she would ask my sister and mother when I was coming to see her and I promised her I was coming to see her. My promises turned in days, days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months. I called home regularly, but that's not what my Grandma needed. She needed my physical presence, but I was so caught up in my own emotions, I couldn't hear her cries. Eventually my Grandma was diagnosed with lung cancer. She was now living at home, and my mother was taking care of her. Because she was home now I thought she was going to be fine.

One morning I was preparing for work and had a missed call on my cell phone. It was Tracey, and she had left a message. She told me my Grandma was back in the hospital. She was in the Intensive Care Unit, and she was on life support. Now it finally hit me. It finally hit me that my Grandma could die. As I drove home that rainy day, I was very upset with myself. All I could think about was my Grandma Corina. How this woman did everything in her power to ensure that me, selfish me, insecure me, silly me, could experience and have the best in

life. She wanted me to have the blessings she and my mother were unable to experience, and all she wanted was for me to show I loved her. She only wanted me to show her love by taking the time to love on her, instead of feeling sorry for myself.

When I got to the hospital, I was not prepared to see my family. My mother as always was happy to see me, but I could feel the tension from my sister. My brothers were happy I was home, but my Tracey didn't say anything to me. My mother took me to my Grandma's room and my uncle, Danny was there by her bedside. He was holding her hand, and his wife was standing by his side. As I walked into the room, my heart hit the floor. This woman would care for other people, cared for both of her dying parents, cared for my family, cared for the neighborhood children, and here she was lying in this bed with a pump to breath for her. My Grandma's condition was getting worse, and they were preparing to give her the last bag of blood. The lawyers were waiting for her to die, and take her off life support, but she was waiting for something. My Grandma knew she was going to die, but she wanted one thing before she died. She wanted one thing, and my mother would make sure she had her last request. She wanted to see my face before she died.

What do you say? How do you verbalize, articulate, and show someone you love them when their body was present, but their spirit was gone. The body lying before me resembled my Grandma, but her spirit was gone. As I stood there watching her spiritless body, I cried. I wanted to touch her, to kiss her, to hug her, but would she know that it was me? I touched her soft hands, but they were cold. I told her how much I loved her, and how I was so sorry. I told her all the

things we tell our love ones, when it was too late. I told her how much I appreciated everything she did for me. I told her thank you for providing for me, praying for me, and believing in me when I couldn't believe in me. I told her all these things and more. I watched my Grandma slip in out of conscious, and I knew the time was coming.

They gave my Grandma her last bag of blood. My mother was so sure my Grandma would make a turn around. My father felt the same thing as well. Maybe they were in denial or maybe death rode with me that day, but I knew my Grandma was going to die. My family decided to go home, and we would return that night. My siblings decided to ride home with me. Although Tracey was upset with me, I knew my sister missed me. We caught up, and as usual, Tracey was telling me how I needed to move home. Once we made it home, I had to leave. I had to get away because I was feeling so many emotions. I knew my parents and siblings were having the same feelings. I wanted to talk to them, but I was afraid. I was afraid because I knew my family was upset with me because of my behavior, and I wasn't prepared to express my feelings to my family. Since I was in high school, my family did not see the weak side of me. I couldn't talk to them, so I ran to the place that I could.

I got in my car and I went to see someone who represented something I could not touch or have right now. I went to see someone who was love, who cared, who would enjoy my company, and I know I would have a great laugh. I went to see Mark's Grandma. Mark's Grandma lived 20 minutes away from my home. When we were together, I became very close to his Grandma. As I knocked on the door, she was surprised, but happy to see me.

“Hey Shemika” she greeted me cheerfully while hugging me tightly.

“Hi Ms. Anna how are you?”

“Baby I’m fine. Don’t get company much so I sure am glad you came by.

You want something to eat?”

“Oh no maam”

“You sure you don’t want anything. I got some fruit salad in the refrigerator.”

“Yeah, I know that’s Mark favorite. No I’m fine thanks for offering.” I declined respectfully.

“So what you doing down here baby?”

“Ummm...I came down to see my grandmother. She’s on life support. The doctors are expecting her pass sometime this evening” I respond with little emotion.

Mark’s grandma gave her sincere condolences, and she showed me her new cell phone. She wasn't very technologically advanced, so she had no clue about cell phones. I activated her phone for her, created her phonebooks with numbers, and showed her to operate the phone. I was doing this for over an hour, but I didn’t mind because I wanted to help her. I guess I felt that since I couldn’t help my own Grandma, I would help the woman who had treated me like her own grandchild.

I called Mark and he picked up. Despite what had happened over the past three months, I still ran to him. He was more than a boyfriend, he was my best friend. When some of us end a relationship with a significant other, we can always go and talk to our best friend about our situation. That wasn't the case for

me. Not only did my relationship end, but I lost a friendship as well. I thought during this time I could still turn to him, because I had always turned to him. We talked about my Grandma, and he gave his apologies. I asked him if he could attend the funeral. My ex-boyfriend was very close to my family, and I was close to his family as well. Although we were not in a relationship, I didn't need him as a boyfriend, I needed him as a friend. He told me he would try, but the semester was ending and he had exams. He told me he couldn't promise me anything, but he would try. All I wanted was for him to try. I knew that over the past months we had expressed both negative and positive feelings towards each other. However, I knew our love was so much stronger than the hurt between us. I knew if he were in my place, I would be there for him. Regardless of what had happened, I would be there because I loved him. I prayed he could hear in my voice that I needed him.

My Grandma died the next day. My mother was truly hurt, but she didn't express it. She carried on as if things were okay, but I really didn't know how she was feeling on the inside. I came back home the next Friday to attend the funeral. My mother's family attended the funeral as well. I was so shocked to see my mother's side of the family. My Grandma would often tell me about this family. I had seen the pictures, but to see them in person was something very different. I was happy to meet them. They were so happy to see my mother, but they were also concerned about her health. My mom wasn't in the emotional or mental mindset to plan a funeral. Tracey planned the funeral.

The day of the funeral was the day like every other funeral you attend. I was sad, but I knew my grandmother was in a better place. The day of the funeral,

I checked my phone every five minutes, and I would jump every time I saw a car that resembled Mark's car. I called him and no answer. My call was directed straight to his voicemail. During the funeral, I was hoping maybe he had shown up, and he was sitting in the back. At the end of the funeral, I searched the entire church for one familiar face, but it wasn't present. My family was asking about him, and I told them he was coming. Maybe he was stuck in traffic. Maybe he had car trouble. Maybe he was coming to see my family later. I had all the possibilities, but I knew one thing was definite. I knew one thing to be true. Mark was not coming.

I drove back home that night, and I had a long drive. I called him again, and still no answer. When I finally made it home, I called my parents to let them know I made it home safely. I called Mark one more time to make sure he knew I had made it home safely. In case he cared.

When someone dies, I believe the grief doesn't truly hit you until after the burial. It finally hit me my Grandma was dead. A woman who had sacrificed so much for me had left this earth, and I would never see her again. I would never have the chance to visit with her. Never have the chance to take her grocery shopping. Never have the chance to watch movies with her. I will never have the chance to hear her hum one of her revised gospel songs. So many times, I had taken her for granted, and I never had the chance to tell her thank you. Telling someone thank you on their deathbed, was very different from saying thank you when you can look into their eyes and they can hear the sincerity in your voice.

My Grandma's death was another disappointment in my life I had to deal with. When things couldn't get any worse, they did. The animosity between my

sorority sisters grew stronger. Another fiasco was on the horizon, and once again my name was involved in this incident. The sorority was being investigated for hazing, and they assumed that I was the informant. With all that was going on in my head, hazing was the last thing on mind. Although they did not have proof, they felt justified because they thought I was trying to get back at them for what happened the past year. Therefore, my sorority sisters took this situation to another level. The entire campus knew about the hazing allegations, and they tried to turn other people against me. Well, they succeed in doing that. Young women interested in my sorority were instructed not to talk to me, and my sorority sisters badmouthed me to the other people. My line sisters had dragged my name through the dirt the year before, and here we are a year later with the same nonsense. Well this was my reaction, and it was not the appropriate action. I called one of my sorority sisters to talk about the situation, and it blew out of control. I called her because I was upset, and I shouldn't have called her. I knew the accusation was petty, but I had finally reached my limit. I could take the whispers, the stares, and the blatant disrespect; however, there was only so much a person can take. They were my sorority sisters, and they knew what buttons to push with me. They had pushed my buttons, and I had fallen right into their hands. After I realized that my retaliation added more wood to this everlasting burning fire, I decided to keep my mouth shut. I continued to hear the rumors, I received the stares, and I remained silent. I became invisible.

Two weeks after my Grandma's funeral I saw Mark. I was at home, and Sara called me. She told me she saw Mark in the library studying. I was so happy. I don't know why I was happy, but I wanted to see him. I hadn't seen him in

weeks, and although I was hurt about him not attending my Grandma's funeral, I still wanted to see him. I drove back to school, and this was a 45-minute drive! I called Jada and Jackie, and I made them come to the library with me. Yes, I made them. We came up with some plan, and we looked so obvious. I think we were studying and Jada was supposed to "coincidentally" run into him. So we put the plan in action, but we were acting more like anxious 16-year-old girls, instead of grown women. We finally got it together, and the moment came where I was to talk to him. We talked about his classes, his stresses, and his family. When I asked him why he drove 45 minutes to study at my school, he told me he was here because his fraternity was having a party that night. He decided to study and go to the party. He told me how he had studied here all week because it was his fraternity week, and he wanted to support them. Although he had graduated, it was important for him to show his fraternity support. We said our good-byes, and I left. I had to admire his undying love for his fraternity. I can't say it was truly admiration or if I was puzzled. I remember just last week I called on him as a friend, and he could not even support me. He did not come to my Grandma's funeral, and he did not have decency to call. However, he rearranged his "study" plans to show support to his fraternity. As I walked out the library many thoughts ran through my head, and things were finally making sense.

“Angel”

Troubled little angel
Inconsistent...flying blind most of the time
Drama queen

Preening and untanglin'
Feathers in her wings
Captured by her dreams
Desperately she sings

Needy little baby
Open up your heart
Don't you be afraid to feel
Needy little baby
Hidin' deep inside
Don't you know your love can heal

Troubled little angel
Inconsistent
Flying blind most of the time
Don't know who to be [yeah]
Always rearranging the wreckage of her life
Ever holding tight to the hope that she'll be free

Needy little baby
Open up your eyes
Don't you be afraid to feel
Needy little baby
Hidin' deep inside
Don't you know your love can heal

I'm talking to you angel

Angel

Deep inside of me

I'm talking to you angel

Angel

One day you'll be free

(Khan,2007, Track 4)

Narrative Background: The final narrative Angel represents the deep depression I experienced as well as the feelings of hopelessness, shame, and guilt.

Dear Diary May 10, 2004

The spring semester of graduate school is over, and now I am about to enter the last part of this race. Once again, I am taking an overload of graduate school classes, but I am graduating in August. This is my primary goal at this time, and it is really the only thing I have going for me. I have learned to deal with my issues, but there is this major weight lying on my heart. I have learned to function, but inside I'm lifeless. I cannot really explain this feeling. Every day I go to work, I study, I run my errands, attend bible study, and attend church. I am functioning during the day, but it is the night. The nighttime is the time I am forced to examine my reality. In my reality I'm hurt because of the lost of Mark and my sorority sisters, and tormented because of the way I treated my Grandma. I ruminate on these three topics until daylight. I have totally withdrawn myself from any type of social activities. I enjoy spending time with Jackie, Lena, and Jade, but they have boyfriends and so I understand.

Dear Diary May 14, 2004:

This summer I do not have a graduate assistantship to pay for my school, so I have to take out a student loan. Since I'm taking an overload of classes my classes conflict with my job, so I have to make a choice. I could resign and take classes, and not have a job. My second choice is to keep my job, and graduate in the fall. If I considered the 1st choice from my present situation I could keep my

job, but if I delay my graduation I would also delay my chances of getting a real job. In my field, most hiring occurs in the summer and rarely in the middle of the year. However, I could resign, take my classes, and use the summer as the opportunity to find a job in my field. I think I will resign from my job and hope for the best.

Dear Diary May 16, 2004:

I'm unemployed and I am afraid. God has tested my faith, but never on this level. This test would require more faith in him. It's very easy to say you have faith, but it is another thing to step out on faith. I know this is my test of faith, although I'm not ready for this test, I have to take the test. I have applied for jobs everywhere, but I can't get a job. My student loan paid my tuition for school and the remaining amount will pay for my expenses for June. I have to secure employment to cover my expenses for July and August. Today's only May 16th so I will remain hopeful and faithful.

Dear Diary May 17, 2004

Thanks to Jackie, I'm able to work a temporary job once or twice a week for a couple of hours. However, this money is used to keep gas in my car. Every day I go out seeking a job, and everywhere I turn, there is a closed door. This situation is extremely frustrating for me. Here I am a college graduate, I am acquiring my Master's in less than a couple of months and I cannot get a job. I didn't understand why I am unemployed. My current situation does not line up with everything I is raised to believe. I was taught a college education would guarantee open doors, but all the doors I go to are closed. I can't get a job because I don't have enough experience or I am over-qualified. Someone with only a high

school diploma or no diploma has a better chance at attaining a job than me. I don't care if I am over-qualified I have bills, and they needed to be paid. Since I don't have a job and I have no income this is just another item to add to my list of disappointments. I don't understand what God is doing. I mean is God trying to punish me? I mean isn't it enough for God to take Mark away, ended the relationships with my sorority sisters, and take my Grandma.

Dear Diary: June 7th, 2004

Since I have ample time to think and mediate I began to realize that when we are going through a period like this in our life many times God is removing things, people, and acts out of our life because our life is moving in a different direction. I'm hopeful for the future, but the present is here today and today seems like yesterday and all the days seem to run together.

Dear Diary: June 23, 2004

Last night I talked to Mark and we decided to watch a movie at my apartment. Actually, I coaxed him to come watch a movie with me, and since he did not have anything to do, he came over. I did not have any money, but I had a free movie rental pass. When Mark came over, he wanted to order some Chinese food. So I ordered the food for him, and he did not ask me if I would like any food. Mark knows my financial situation, and he knows I don't have any money. Yet, he did not ask me if I would like anything. I drove him to the restaurant to pick up HIS food. I had two dollars in my pocket, seriously! I had not eaten all day, and I did not have any food at home. After we picked up his food, I picked up a cheeseburger off the dollar menu. Back at the apartment, I ate my dry cheeseburger while this guy is eating Chicken Lo Mien! I asked him for some of

his food, and he had a temper tantrum. I thought I was eating with a young child. He is acting so selfish. I could not believe he is acting this way towards me. There were many days when I took my last so this man could eat. Here I am the woman he supposedly loved for five years, eating a dry cheeseburger, and this man is acting foolish because I ask for a piece of chicken? I tried to laugh the incident off, but secretly I knew something was wrong with this picture.

Dear Diary July 8, 2004:

I am still un-employed and this situation is getting worse. I can't pay my bills, and when you cannot pay your bills this can drive you crazy. My parents can't support me because they have my other siblings to take care, but they try to help when they can. I knew my situation was terrible when I came home and I found a past due notice on my door. This pressure is something I have never felt before. I am afraid because I don't have the money to pay these bills. What if I get evicted? What if my car is repossessed?

I know this is a test of my faith, but I am looking at my reality. Thankfully, I have found a part-time job at a retail store. I am working eight to fifteen hours a week. This will pay my minor utility bills, but I don't have any money to survive. I don't have money for food or for gas. I can't go to class many mornings because I don't have gas. At these moments, I break down and cry. Attaining my master's is the only thing motivating me through this turbulent time in my life. However, I don't even have gas to go to class. I feel God had truly forsaken me, and I have nothing to live for. Everything I have loved, worked hard to attain, or am trying to acquire is slowly but surely being taken away from me.

Dear Diary: July 9, 2004

Today's my birthday, but it's just another day. As I do a replay of my life, I can see the good times and I see the bad times. I try to focus on the positive, but my reality is hitting me in the face. How did I get here? How did I get to a place of loneliness? How did I get to this place where the man who promised to love me forever doesn't even care how I feel? How did I get to this place where I placed other people before my family? How did I get to this place where I stop respecting myself and loving myself? I mean I was supposed to be successful. There were so many people believing great things for me. I was supposed to escape the past that I thought hindered me. However, here I am alone. The questions continue to run through my mind, with the primary question being how did you get here? Now I understood how it feels to be useless to anyone. I truly believe my existence only hurts the people who I have loved the most. I mean Mark is gone, my sorority sisters are gone, and my Grandma is gone. I have caused these people so much pain. Happy Birthday to you!

The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill

*My world it moves so fast today
The past it seems so far away
And I squeeze it so tight, I can't breathe
And every time I try to be
What someone has thought of me
So caught up, I wasn't able to achieve
But deep in my heart the answer it was in me
And I made up my mind to find my own destiny
I look at my environment
And wonder where the fire went
What happened to everything we used to be
I hear so many cry for help
Searching outside of themselves
Now I know His strength is within me
And deep in my heart the answer it was in me
And I made up my mind to find my own destiny
And deep in my heart the answer it was in me
And I made up my mind to find my own destiny*

(Hill, 1998, track 14)

Interpretation

Part I

The narrative *A House Is Not a Home* (Vandross, 1989, track 8) is based on my childhood memories from the age of five until approximately the age of nine. The artist stated that, “a room is not a house, and a house is not a home when the two of us are far apart, and one of us has a broken heart.” The images described in this verse were analogous to my parents. Although my mother and father lived in the same house, we were not a family; therefore, it was not a home. As a child I absorbed the emotions of my father and my mother, and felt they were both suffering from a broken heart. Therefore, the song expressed my desire for my parents to love each other. As a child I thought that if my parents loved each other they could love me. Yet, the narrative revealed my own helplessness in preventing and intervening in my parents’ fights, as well as, my inability to comfort my siblings during the conflict.

Examining this narrative through the lens of Black Feminist thought exposed the cultural impressions that shaped my self-representation, perception of others, and relationships with others. The theoretical concept of intersectionality (Dill et al., 2007; Jones, 2009) in this narrative revealed my position, as well as, my family’s position in society as African Americans living in poverty. Although my mother experienced domestic abuse-sometimes as the victim and the aggressor- because of her position in society as a woman with five children with an 8th grade education she was financially dependent on my father. In addition, my father was an African American male who was

reared in poverty, and like my mother his highest grade of completion was the eighth grade.

These intersecting oppressions resulted in my family residing in an impoverished neighborhood plagued with drugs and violence. These intersecting oppressions impacted my education as well. Because of my parents lack of education my siblings and I were not educationally prepared to enter school. However, it is important to note the privilege of my position. Unlike my other peers I was raised in a two parent home, and received the emotional benefits of having a mother and father. My siblings and I had the privilege of attending a school with teachers who were prepared to address our deficiencies; in addition, my parents were active in our remediation efforts. Although I was not prepared in the beginning, I was confident that I would succeed because of my support from my teachers and parents. Additionally, my family lived in a neighborhood with individuals who cared about the well-being of others. This sense of community gave me a sense of peace although we lived in chaos.

Examining the oppression and privilege of my position exposed the values my cultural experience taught me such as the importance of two parent homes. Teachers were respected and the most esteemed members of our community because of their ability to empower another individual. I also learned that education and future income were inter-related. From my community I learned with the assistance of others I could live in dire conditions and not only survive, but thrive as well.

My desire for love from my nuclear family expanded into a desire for love from my extended family in the narrative "*A vision of love*," which detailed my preadolescent years (Carey, 1990, track 1). The song illustrated the paradoxical tensions I experienced

because of this desire. As stated in the lyrics, “I had a vision of love and it was all that you turned out to be,” shows the fulfillment of this desire through my relationships with my mother’s family. These relationships provided love, support, nurturance, and value. Yet, my vision of love was still a dream because I experienced the opposite with my father’s family.

This narrative explained my developing yet shaky self-representation, by introducing the aspects of beauty and sexuality as communicated in my culture. In the African American culture hair was a defining factor in determining if a woman was considered beautiful. This idea represents one of the many psychological impacts of slavery much like the issue regarding skin complexion. It was important to address the aspect of beauty because it is connected to sexuality.

The interaction between my Aunt Juanita and I exposed my confusion regarding the appropriate communication between females and males. In addition, this passage introduced the power of language and naming others. In the African American culture, girls were considered “*fast* or *hot*” if they communicated and interacted with boys. My cultural interpretation of these expressions represented a young girl who was sexually advanced or a young girl that welcomed the advances. The expression Aunt Juanita used “*coat*” was a shorter version of the term courting; however, it was a negative expression because individuals who were “coating” were having sex. Although I wanted to ask my Aunt Jaunita the meaning of the terms, the topic of sex was off limits to children. Therefore, I came to understand the meanings behind these terms by overhearing conversations regarding sex.

In addition, this narrative illustrated my admiration for my Grandma Corine as an intellectual as defined by Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981) because of the wisdom she imparted regarding the importance of financial independence and self-reliance. I viewed her financial stability and independence as strengths, yet if her characterization in this narrative was investigated in a different context such as intersectionality these strengths could be viewed as differently. Her characterization is similar to the controlling image of the Matriach. In the conversation between my Uncle Danny and Grandma Corine, my Uncle Danny reminded my Grandma that she would be lonely if he left. This possible abandonment contributed insight into my Grandma Corine's singleness. The depiction between these two characters may also offer the impression that my Grandma emasculated my Uncle Danny. However, as a single mother my Grandma Corine was solely responsible for teaching her son the importance of respecting rules, making good decision. In addition the dialogue revealed her looming fear that my Uncle Danny was involved in criminal activity.

The narrative *Beautiful Girl* (Lattimore, 1999, track 7) represented a very confusing period in my life by exploring my transition into adolescence. The song *Beautiful Girl* (Lattimore, track 7) represented the image of a woman I wanted to become. It also revealed the perception I wanted others to have of me, a woman considered valuable and worthy of love from others. Because of my experience with sexual abuse I questioned my beauty and value, and believed that if I remained a virgin I might have the opportunity to experience this emotion with someone I loved.

Detailing the emotional pain experienced by my mother and sister was included to give additional insight into their experience, and my identification with their pain. This

aspect also revealed the cultural view regarding mental health. Although my mother and sister were experiencing depression, my family was unable to identify and address this issue. Again, examining the concept of intersectionality, more specifically, the oppression of race and class. From the cultural perspective, mental health illness is stigmatized and misunderstood in the African American community. This sentiment was evident in my home as well. Those suffering from a mental health issue sought support from religious institutions or friends and family.

Socio-economic class position is important to address because we lived in poverty. Poverty can cause family dysfunction, stress on spousal relationships, and depression (Conger, 1994; Payne, 2005). Therefore, my family was unable to address their depression because this was considered normal. Moreover, the family's priority was survival as detailed in the narrative. Therefore, when I began experiencing symptoms of depression during and after the sexual abuse it was considered normal.

My experience with sexual abuse reflected the findings discussed in the Related Literature. I was abused by a family member (Wyatt, 1985), experienced feelings of powerlessness that manifested as anxiety, sleeping disorders, fears, and hyper-vigilance (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985, 1987), in addition to the psychological impact of stigmatization (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985, 1987). The feelings of guilt, shame, and low-self-esteem contributed to my poor self-representation. The internalized messages I had regarding the CSA were influenced by the messages communicated in discourse regarding sexuality and sexual violence. These messages communicated in discourse represent the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality described in Black Feminist thought. In this narrative I described a conversation where my father stated that

women who dressed provocatively invited sexual advances from other men. Sexual violence against African American women was expected and accepted (West, 2006). This cultural belief was supported by father's conviction that women were responsible for their victimization. Before the sexual abuse I was taught that "*fast*" or "*hot*" girls welcomed sexual advances. This message epitomizes the cultural implications of sexual violence because African American women were labeled as carnal and animalistic (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981) which incited feelings of shame regarding their sexuality.

My desire for connection was explained in the narrative *Four Seasons of Loneliness* (Boyz II Men, 1997, track 3). The four seasons mentioned in this song represent my freshman through senior year of high school. Although the song expressed an unrequited love it also described a journey shared between lovers. The metaphors in this song represented the loneliness I felt because of my mother's absence in my life. I formed positive relationships with other women, peers, mentors, and members of my community. Yet, I still felt alone during this period because this time represented my journey into womanhood. A journey that I made alone and one that I wished I had shared with my mother.

The importance of a connection with my mother can be examined through the Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) Framework. Although my upbringing and experience caused me to become an individualist (Kashima et al., 2001), at my core I was relational and focused on maintaining relationships with significant others (Kashima et al., 2001). My journey through adolescence was very similar to the psychological stages posited in Relational Cultural Theory. As a teenager I was confident in my academics because my teachers, mentors, and peers saw me as I saw myself in this area. However, as purported

in RCT I was closing down (Jordan, et al, 1991). My socialization and experience with abuse taught me that I could not express every aspect of my self-representation, especially in the area of sexuality. I internalized feelings of shame and guilt regarding sex; in addition, I negotiated my multiple selves to fulfill my desire to “being-in-relationship” (Jordan et al., 1991) and emphasized my commitment to doing for others to resolve conflict.

Black Feminist thought provides additional insight into my desire to connect with my mother. Having a connection with my Grandma Corine, Rita, and Aunt Denise improved my self-representation because those relationships represented a space where I could inquire without criticism (Okeke, 2000). However, those connections could not replace the knowledge I was seeking from my mother. Although my mother and I were coming from different perspectives, there was still some common connection or group knowledge present that I desired my mother to share with me. When my family’s socio-economic class was an issue that ended a relationship I believed this factor would always be present in my life. For example, reassurance from my mother regarding this experience would have challenged the existing thoughts of shame I experienced for being reared in poverty. I wanted my mother’s insight on why it was expected to accept mistreatment from a family member, even at the expense of your own self-worth. I wanted to understand why my father’s family members expected me to become a welfare mother. Black Feminist thought’s characterization of the welfare mother as lazy, content in collecting government assistance, poor, and unwed personified my own view of the welfare mother (Collins, 2000). This view was so dominant in my mind, that I began experiencing internalized racism.

Part II

The narrative *Doo Wop (That Thing)* (Hill, 1998, track 5) described the beginning of my journey in fulfilling my dream of completing a degree. Although I was academically prepared, this narrative described how I was not prepared for the lessons on life and love taught outside the classroom. Struggling to maintain my value system and understand the consequences of sex was illustrated in the narrative, *Sweet Lady* (Gibson, 1998, track 4). The song for this narrative represented the romanticizing of my courtship with Mark and my desire for reconciliation. The narrative *Doo Wop (That Thing)* (Hill, 1998, track 5) has a significant meaning to me because of the song's timely release during the first semester of my freshman year. This song revealed the power of music as a medium for communicating and challenging discourse. For example, as I reflect on this time, the discourse in music often presented African American women as hypersexual or characteristics that personify the controlling image of Jezebel (Collins, 2000). Black Feminist thought discussed how the term "freak" was used to describe women displaying inappropriate sexual behavior, and I found this to be true because it was a term my peers and I used to describe girls who were sexual. The images of women in videos or described in songs during my adolescence projected the image of African American women as hyper-sexual. For me, these images sent the message that African American women were used as sexual beings intended to bring pleasure to others.

Therefore, I considered the message communicated in this song as controversial because Hill (1998) challenged African American women to examine their choices regarding sex, love, relationships, and self-image. This song was not only informative for me, it was empowering because I began to realize that African American women had a

choice. Neither the African American man nor any other man owned the African American woman's sexuality. The African American could own her sexuality. Equally important, the song warns African American women about men who are only seeking sex. The communication of this warning reiterates the caution African American women must exercise in regards to her sexuality. The need to be cautious regarding my sexuality and sexual violence reinforced the belief I was taught about the good girl. More importantly, the examination of the good girl exposed my views regarding my self-representation. It was important that I represent those characteristics because I wanted to be recognized for my strengths or admirable traits. The narrative depicted the qualities of the good girl, most importantly, the proposed benefits of performing in this role. Because the good girl possessed qualities the African American culture esteemed as valuable, she was permitted to enter social circles or receive entitlements reserved for a chosen few. The highest honor the good girl could receive was being chosen as a wife. I found this cultural implication significant because it revealed the hegemonic relationship between African American women and men.

This hegemonic relationship emphasized the perception that the African American woman's position in society was determined by the African American man. Relational Cultural theory supports this assertion as well. RCT notes that although both genders start life attached, men are encouraged to develop their individuality. Therefore, men transition to a state of learning that they are in control of their fate, so, the value of affiliations and connections diminish. Although women develop and change, women remain in a state of believing their fate is in the hands of another individual. Hence, as women continue to grow, women transfer this connection to a male figure (Miller, 1976;

Jordan, 2010). This transfer occurs because dominant discourse reiterates the faulty belief that “women cannot depend on their own individual development, achievement, or power because if they try, they are doomed to failure” (Miller, 1976, p.87). So although Hill’s (1998) song introduced a new perspective regarding power and sexuality, this claim could not refute the faulty belief I upheld that my success and self-representation was connected to a man. Yet, the narrative detailed the dialectical tension present in the discussion of the character, Savannah from the movie *Waiting to Exhale*. Savannah embodied the good girl image, yet the man she loved did not marry her. This example created resistance because the good girl could fulfill the expectations of her role, yet still not be chosen. For me, this thought presented the image of the good girl as powerless; therefore, I rationalized that Savannah was to blame.

Struggling to understand the dialectical tension present regarding my sexuality and how my perceived powerlessness deepen my desire to connect with an individual who had betrayed my trust are some of the issues discussed in the narrative, *Sweet Lady*. As Miller (1976) noted the desire for connection is not a weakness, but it was the source of my problems because I was seeking to connect with an unhealthy individual. The desire to commit to a relationship that would lead to marriage was the highest honor because it validated me as someone worthy to be loved, thereby removing the feelings of guilt and shame from my childhood. This preceding point provides insight into my perception of Mark and how this perception shaped my self-representation. Because the nature of our courtship did not follow the guidelines I learned regarding sex I was afraid that I would no longer be viewed as a good girl. If Mark and I’s friendship did not result in a relationship I feared I was used for sex once again. This fear of being used would

imply that I was tainted, unworthy, ignorant. The term tainted is appropriate in this context because in my mind, my virginity was my saving grace.

Because of the guilt and shame resulting from the CSA, maintaining my virginity redeemed me from this indiscretion. Although I made the choice to have sex, the idea of sex not occurring within a relationship or he was in a relationship meant that I was unworthy. Because if I was worthy or valued, Mark would want to “connect” with me. In addition, my inability to discern Mark’s intentions was a reflection of my intelligence. I valued my intelligence because this aspect of my self-representation empowered me when I was in a powerless situation. More importantly, my intelligence protected me from danger. If Mark didn’t fit this persona that would infer that I willingly allowed myself to be victimized again. My willingness to allow another individual to use me was yet another reflection of how I viewed myself, and how others would perceive me. Therefore, I remained open to reconciliation with Mark. This is not surprising since my development and self-representation were contingent upon my ability to make connections (Miller, 1976). When Mark and I reconciled, the relationship provided the affirmation I had sought from others. My relationship with Mark in the beginning was similar to the aspects of mutual empowerment. This connection provided a sense of vitality for both of us, and a sense of worth. This relationship allowed me to be emotionally available and vulnerable.

Crazy Over You (112, 1998, track 13). The lyrics of this song accurately describe the emotions shared and reciprocated between Mark and I depicted in this narrative. During this time in my life Mark and I relied on each other, and Mark was my best friend, partner, and family. This narrative explored my evolving relationship with my family

and how I was slowly distancing myself from my family. As Mark and I transitioned into new stages of our life during our undergraduate experience, the relationship was tested and the narrative “*Every little bit hurts*” (Keys, 2005, track 9) illustrated my attempts to deny the impending changes. The song and narrative also revealed the powerlessness I felt because Mark was seeking to leave the relationship.

The termination of the relationship with Mark affected me physically, emotionally, and mentally as depicted in the narrative, *Breakdown* (Carey, 1997, track 6). This song for this narrative personified the image I projected as a strong and resilient woman. Yet, the song exposed and provided insight into my self-degrading beliefs and feelings of shame, inferiority, and low self-worth. Thereby, revealing my true feelings and thoughts about myself and deteriorating self-image. This narrative complements Miller’s (1976) belief that a woman’s self-esteem is contingent upon her relationships. Because my relationship with Mark was in disconnection again, this was a reflection of my worth. Since my self-representation was broken I was actively seeking another outlet, person, or group to affirm my value. The desire to become a member of an organization with historical significance in advancing Black women, in addition to embodying characteristics esteemed by the Black community was one of the many reasons why I joined a sorority. This image esteemed by the Black community is the stereotypical image “the lady.” The sorority I joined projected this image, and there was an expectation for each member to conform to this image.

In addition, I longed to develop bonds with women who were considered not only friends, but sisters. In addition, receiving the honor to enter circles reserved for those considered elite-such as my sorority-diminished my feelings of inferiority and generated

feelings of superiority. My journey into sisterhood and reconciliation with Mark is portrayed in the narrative *Pieces of Me* (Ledisi, 2011, track 1). This narrative illustrated my commitment to my relationship with Mark, and a longing for Mark to reciprocate those feelings. As my undergraduate experience came to a culmination I became somewhat aware of my ignorance regarding my own ethnicity and cultural background. I explored this aspect through my involvement in Greek life which represented a shift in my perception of education. This period also presented unforeseen challenges in regards to my relationships with my sorority sisters as revealed in the narrative *What about your friends* (TLC, 1992, track 7).

Part III

The power of disconnection in relationships was succinctly characterized in the narrative *Outside* (Carey, 1997, track 12). This narrative depicted the many emotions and thoughts I considered because of my rejection from my sorority. The narrative presented the contentions I could not understand, because although I had a support system outside the sorority, I still felt alone. This experience exposed the underlying fear Carey (1997) described as “Standing alone eager to just believe it's good enough to be what you really are but in your heart uncertainty forever lies. And you'll always be somewhere on the outside.” (track 12). This uncertainty is reminder of the feelings I experienced during my childhood, and served as a reminder that I had to withhold certain aspects of myself if I wanted to connect to others.

As I reflect on this period, the dissolution of my relationships with my sorority sisters affected me in ways I was unable to conceptualize. During this time I was on a

rollercoaster, or as the narrative is titled, *Emotional Rollercoaster* (Green, 2003, track 6).

The song concisely described my experience during this time in the following verse,

Yesterday I told myself I was gonna be okay. Gonna start a new day be truly happy. I was gonna take control of me. But eventually reality hit me mentally, physically, emotionally. And I opened my eyes and realized that I was still being taken for a constant ride (Green, 2003, track 6).

Like other experiences I had encountered I employed my coping and defense mechanisms of avoiding, trivializing, rationalizing, and denial to function with the change. I knew I was resilient, I was a fighter, and I was a survivor. Yet I could not ignore the feelings of powerlessness and shame.

Acceptance is a tough pill to swallow, especially when you have exhausted every option. I was beginning to feel hopeless, yet I tried. I continued to make attempts to reconcile with Mark and my sorority sisters, and every attempt fell on deaf ears. Hence, the narrative *I Try*, (Bofill, 1979, track 1) exposed my feelings of self-worth and the deep, emotional pain I experienced. The emotional pain of trying to rectify my wrongdoing and the inability to articulate my need for support intensified with each failed attempt. The attempts proved to be fruitless, and each rejection reiterated the self-defeating beliefs regarding my own self-worth. I was grieving the loss of the relationships, and I moved from denial to anger. I was angry with Mark because he left me when I needed him the most. I was angry with my sorority sisters because they did not care about me, in addition to realizing that our relationship was superficial. Sadly, I was most angry with was myself, because I felt like a failure. I failed at being a sorority sister and I failed at being a girlfriend.

I was learning to cope with the losses of significant relationships. Although the process was difficult, there was always the possibility of making amends or admiring their successes from afar. However, losing a loved one through death was more difficult for me because there were no chances to make amends. I attribute much of my strength to my grandmother, yet, I never thanked her. So the narrative *If only you knew* (LaBelle, 1983, track 4) expressed the regret I experienced over my grandmother's death. As the song lyrics stated, "I must have rehearsed my lines a thousand times until I had them memorized. But when I get up the nerve to tell you, the words just never seem to come out right." I never told my grandmother how much I loved her, how I was grateful for everything she did that aided in my growth and development, or express how much I admired her. The song reminded me of my guilt as well because I would never have a conversation with my grandmother, see her paint her nails, hear her sing, or comb her hair. Instead of spending those precious moments with her, I was mourning the loss of the people who chose to depart my life. I never questioned my grandmother's love for me, yet I was mourning the loss of individuals whose commitment I questioned was ever sincere.

The final narrative *Angel* represented the deep depression I experienced as well as the feelings of hopelessness, shame, and guilt. This song communicates the inner conflict I was experiencing. There was a part of me that was seeking to intellectualize the loss. What I was seeking from others, I could give to myself. However, this would require me to feel the pain. I would have to feel the pain and emotion I had suppressed since my childhood. The narratives in this section piece illuminate the power of a ruptured relationship or disconnection. As stated previously,

disconnection can have a powerful impact on the woman's self-representation. As expressed in the narrative I believe the rupture of my relationships with Mark and my sorority occurred because we were unable to understand each other. However, as the disconnection continued I felt powerless, unable to represent my feelings, and experienced difficulty in receiving their responses of indifference (Jordan, 2010). As I transitioned to graduate school, experienced the loss of friendships, and the loss of my Grandma I felt more alone.

The progression of the disconnection lead to diminished self-worth (Jordan, 2010) resulting in shame and my engaging in blame attribution. I felt responsible for those relationships, creating the connections, and maintaining the connections (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1986). Since I blamed myself, and felt responsible, I considered myself a failure. Because these connections were important to me, I altered aspects of myself by becoming more accommodating and passive in an effort to reconnect (Comstock et al., 2008). Since these attempts failed I eventually turned away from others and entered condemned isolation (Jordan, 2010). Once I entered condemned isolation, I experienced shame and questioned my value as a human being.

Get it together

One shot to your heart without breaking your skin
No one has the power to hurt you like your kin
Kept it inside, didn't tell no one else
Didn't even wanna admit it to yourself
And now your chest burns and your back aches
From 15 years of holding the pain
And now you only have yourself to blame
If you continue to live this way

Get it together
You wanna heal your body
You have to heal your heart
Whatsoever you sow you will reap
Get it together

You can fly fly

Dark future ahead of me
That's what they say
I'd be starving if I ate all the lies they fed
Cause I've been redeemed from your anguish and pain
A miracle child I'm floating on a cloud
Cause the words that come from your mouth
You're the first to hear
Speak words of beauty and you will be there
No matter what anybody says
What matters the most is what you think of yourself

The choice is yours
No matter what it is
To choose life is to choose to forgive
You don't have to try
To hurt him and break his pride
To shake that weight off
And you will be ready to fly

One shot to your heart without breaking your skin
No one has the power to hurt you like your friends
Thought it will never change but as time moved on
That ugly duckling grew up to be a swan
And now your chest burns and your back aches
Because now the years are showing up on your face
But you'll never be happy
And you'll never be whole
Until you see the beauty in growing old
(India Arie, 2002, Track 8)

The representations detailed my experience with sexual abuse, and how childhood sexual abuse shaped my self-representation, perception of others, and relationships. The interpretation examined the connections between my experience and themes identified in the theoretical framework thus exposing the influence of culture. An important piece that I must address is the healing process. Exposing the impact of CSA on self-representation is important; however, it is important that I detail how I healed from this experience.

Relationship with God

Throughout the representation, I discuss my relationship with God. During my childhood, I practiced a religion but as I became an adult I developed a relationship with God. It is important that I note this aspect, because it is an aspect of my identity and has answered many of the questions I had regarding this experience. There is a text from the bible that conceptualizes my experience and reiterates the importance of healing (II Samuel 13:1-21). This chapter discussed Tamar the daughter of King David. Tamar was a virgin, and took great pride in her purity for obvious reasons. She was a beautiful woman, but her half-brother Amnon lusted after her. His lust for her was so deep that it controlled him. It controlled him to the point that he devised a scheme to have sex with her. Once Tamar knew of his scheme she begged him not to have sex with her, but to marry her. She knew that if she had sex with Amnon she would break God's law, she would be a disgrace to her family, and she would no longer be considered a woman of character. However, Amnon wasn't interested in following the moral code. He was only concerned about fulfilling his own desires, and so he raped Tamar. Once he raped Tamar he despised her, and rejected her. Tamar was hurt because she lost her virginity, she felt worthless, and sadly, she was rejected. She removed her robe that represented her royalty

and tore her robe which symbolized the tearing of her body sexually. She wept and became bitter. She told her father, King David, but he did nothing. The story exposed King David's inability in disciplining his son, Amnon for sexual perversion a result of King David's own guilt regarding his own sexual perversion.

As I reflect on this story in many ways, I can identify with Tamar. Like Tamar, I was bitter and much like Tamar I tore my robe at the age of 13 to live in bitterness. Before Tamar was raped she was obedient, beautiful, loving, and proud of her purity. However after that experience she was bitter, she had low self-esteem, and she felt worthless. When you are sexually abused by a parental figure, sibling, family member, etc. it breeds a spirit of dependency. When I examined this text, I believe that Tamar was hurt because she was raped. Yet, I would like to propose that Tamar was also upset because Amnon rejected her. When someone close to you abuses you, in some inexplicable manner you form a connection with this individual, a traumatic bond. Although the act is perverse and you do not desire attention in this form, the victim still seeks their approval. You don't want your abuser to reject you because you think you need their love. You come to believe that your abuser is the only person who could love you because you feel worthless.

Moreover, the text reveals how Tamar views herself. Like Tamar, my self-representation changed. This rejection of self I believe is rooted in the rejection we have received from others. For example, Tamar's father King David rejected her. King David was angry about Tamar's rape, but he did nothing. As her father he was supposed to cover her, love her, and protect her. What happens when the person who is supposed to

love you, protect you, and cover you doesn't? These were questions I grappled with during my healing process, and my solution was forgiveness.

It is difficult to embrace forgiveness when you are bitter, especially when you believe this bitterness is justified. I know, personally, that forgiveness can be difficult because you are hurt. You are hurt because you were violated. It's easy to forgive when someone makes a simple mistake or the individual who has offended you requests your forgiveness. However, how do you forgive the person who has molested you or raped you? How do you forgive the person that purposefully plotted like Amnon to hurt you and continued to hurt you? Moreover, they never ask for forgiveness because they deny the offense ever occurred.

I cannot explain how difficult this was for me, especially when I experienced feelings of isolation, shame, anger, and marginalization. However, I learned after many unsuccessful attempts to hurt those who hurt me that unforgiveness kept me tied to the past. When you are tied to the past all you talk about is the past. You continue to talk about past offenses because you are living your life in the past, and not in the present. If you are not living in the present, you don't have hope for the future. Another personality discussed in the bible that I admire is Joseph, the son of Jacob and Rachel. Joseph was handsome, intelligent, and well-favored. He was rejected by his brothers and they sold him into slavery. Although he was a slave he found favor with Potiphar, but Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph and he denied her advances. Although Joseph did what was right, he was sent to prison. Even in prison Joseph found favor, and it was in prison that Joseph's gifts for administration were recognized and he was later promoted as the Governor of Egypt.

In many ways, I believe Joseph and Tamar share the same story. Both characters knew they were destined for greatness, yet they were faced with great adversity. I wondered why Joseph's life was detailed, but after Tamar resorted to bitterness she was no longer mentioned. I am sure there are theologians that could provide a historical perspective, but for me, I saw a key difference between Joseph and Tamar. Joseph chose to forgive those who offended him, whereas Tamar succumbed to her bitterness. Although they went through two different trials, it was their reaction to the adversity that ultimately determined their future. I was bitter about my childhood, my relationship with Mark, and the demise of my relationships with my sorority sisters. I was justified in my feelings, but I was holding myself captive.

In my opinion, I believe Joseph was released from his prison because he had the ability to forgive. It is important to note that at the end of Joseph's story he was appointed as the Governor of Egypt to ensure the country would survive the impending famine. Once the imminent famine reached Egypt, Joseph's brothers were forced to travel to the Egypt to acquire food. The brothers were shocked to find that the brother they thought was dead was now the Governor of Egypt. Joseph's brothers feared his wrath, but Joseph told his brothers "but as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive." (Genesis 50:20). This story revealed to me that Joseph's forgiveness was not only important for his wellbeing, but it was necessary for the nation. If Joseph had not forgiven his brothers, Potiphar's wife, and others who hurt him Joseph would not have arrived at the palace. Therefore the king would have been unaware of the famine, and the nation of Egypt might have perished.

I believe my life experiences over the past seven years have assisted me in developing compassion for those who hurt me, as well as, altering my perception of the experience. Until you come to grips with your past, accept it, understand it, and move on you will never truly understand why you engage in certain behaviors. Sometimes when we see life from our perspective, we tend to ignore or do not consider the perspectives of others. Much like I discussed with the process of crystallization used in Creative Analytic Practice, you're only seeing the facets that you recognize. So when I examined my experience through the lens of forgiveness, I realized that if you're focusing only on the negative, it is very difficult, truly impossible to see the positive in any situation.

Family

I believe this was true for me in regards to my view of my family. It is not my intention to excuse the actions or experiences that occurred during my childhood. However, it is important to note that in my healing I had to examine my perspective of my family. My parents supported my desire to attend college for my own self-improvement. It was also an opportunity for them to partake in the experience they were not afforded. As I matured, I realized how I had not allowed them to partake in this dream. Because of my own personal struggles with my family's intersectionality, I isolated myself from my family. Instead of inspiring my family, I intimidated them. My education was an aspect of my personal identity I diligently pursued, but it was an aspect that made my family feel ashamed and inferior. As I matured I realized that my family, extended family included, loved me. However, it is difficult to express love or empathy for someone when you have not experienced it. I believe my aunts said hurtful comments, because the same comments were once communicated to them. Even in my Aunt Juanita

saying that I was fast, in some way she was looking out for my safety. Over the years I have realized that my father's family has a deep-seated shame and fear of rejection. So much of their actions that I interpreted as hurtful came from their own place of hurt. My relationships have changed drastically because I saw things from their perspective.

I recognize from personal experience that if a person possesses the desire they can overcome any obstacle. My childhood did not provide me with the building blocks or cultivate the foundation for where I currently am or headed in my life. When considering the environment I was reared in my life could have taken a different direction. In so many ways, I promised myself that I would never be like my mother. However, in some ways I am my mother. As I reflect on past experiences, there are many characteristics about my mother I wished I possessed. My mother is so giving and so understanding. However, when I was growing up these were not characteristics I recognized. I saw a woman who dealt with the hurt from her husband by abusing herself. As a child, I only discerned one dimension of my father; yet, my mother saw the other dimensions. Maybe he was showing his true self at all times, or maybe I was only seeing him the way I wanted to see him. Maybe it was both. Over time, I realized the source of my mother's pain. My mother was sexually abused as a child. I learned from my Grandmother Corine, that after Tracey's birth my father introduced my mother to alcohol to divert her attention from his infidelity. Over time, alcohol became my mother's coping mechanism. Four years after Tracey's birth, my mother was pregnant with twins. My twin sisters, Doris and Lois were born prematurely and died three days later. My mother was depressed for two years, and gained over 60 pounds. Two years later I was born in 1980. My father was gambling extensively, drinking, and physically abusing my mother. However, it's important to note

that my paternal grandfather was an alcoholic and physically abused my Grandma Jane. My grandfather physically and verbally abused my father as well. I'm not justifying my mother's actions towards my father, or justifying my father's actions. However, the more I learned about my parents' upbringing it became apparent that there was a cycle of abuse in my family. My parents were only repeating the behaviors they witnessed; unaware of the detrimental impact it would have on their children's lives.

Sorority

Coming to understand the termination of my relationships with my sorority sisters aided in my healing process. It was time for me to confront the fact that my own insecurity regarding my self-worth led me to join an organization where this insecurity could be affirmed. I believe in the adage that birds of a feather flock together. Some of my sorority members shared this insecurity as well. Sharing your insecurities can be a good thing, when you associate with individuals who are not only willing to discuss their problem, but are seeking positive solutions to that problem as well. Some of my sorority sisters had not reached the stage where they were willing to admit this flaw; and before the drama finally exploded, I was one who could not admit this flaw.

It was not until I separated myself from the crowd that I begin to realize that the energy that fueled some of my friendships was a negative energy. It was an energy that belittled others because of their education, material status, and physical appearance. However, I was still hurt about the situation with my sorority sisters. To live through that experience once was difficult, but to relive that experience again was absurd. I could understand the first time because I had played my role in the corresponding actions with my sorority sisters. Although their attack was intentional, I could understand their anger.

However, the second experience was different. I separated myself from the members and the sorority, and yet I was still dragged into the drama. Their behavior towards me was not the real problem. The real problem was the rejection I felt in regards to them.

I realized that no matter how much I grow and try to convince others I have changed, some people are determined to view me in a certain perspective. I had to understand that, and live with it. Most importantly, realize it was not my problem. My situation with my sorority sisters was only a problem with four of my sorority sisters. My friendships with my other sorority sisters have strengthened throughout the many transitions we have made in life. Although we are in different geographic locations, I am still blessed with their friendship.

Mark

In this healing process, learning to forgive my parents and sorority sisters were tasks I could easily achieve. However, I must admit the forgiveness piece with Mark took years. Actually, to be exact, my forgiving Mark occurred in the Fall of 2009. Before that forgiveness took place there were many unsuccessful attempts to forgive, acts of retribution, and bargaining. There was a great deal of bitterness I experienced from 2003-2009 that ranged from anger to depression. Processing that loss revealed many layers of my own dysfunction.

For example, I idolized Mark and needed Mark to be my knight in shining armor. I needed Mark to be my ideal lover, to change my views on love formed during my childhood. This created tension because every time Mark made a mistake, his mistake intensified my existing hurt and pain. It reiterated my negative self-talk and self-defeating behaviors. Instead of recognizing that Mark had to own his behavior, I was more than

willing to blame myself. Not realizing that any and all action Mark had taken was independent of my actions. I also realized my issues with displacement in this relationship. Because I could not express my feelings toward my abuser I displaced those feelings on Mark. It was easy to transfer those feelings to Mark because I knew he cared. However, it was truly unhealthy and toxic because I was unable to address my real issues, in addition to creating unrealistic expectations Mark was unable to fulfill.

Mark's inability to meet my expectations and making poor choices affected Mark as well. Like me, Mark was a perfectionist driven by a need to perform and meet other expectations to validate his own self-worth. So when he hurt me, there was negative self-talk present as well, more specifically, his repeating the same behaviors he witnessed as a child. As illustrated in the narrative, Mark was not fore right regarding his indiscretions or expressed the need to apologize for his actions. Initially I attributed this to a lack of empathy, but I knew this wasn't true because Mark is empathetic. During my healing I realized that Mark's inability to apologize was attributed to his own fragile self-image. He had to deny or minimize his actions or be forced to face that the image he projected was not true.

Moreover, this relationship revealed my unhealthy dependence on another individual. During the representation composition writing the narratives on Mark was difficult because I wanted to present a true depiction of his character. In many ways, Mark and I were very much alike. We were the family heroes running from our past seeking to acquire the markers of success to compensate for our feelings of inadequacy. However, at the center of this connection was the erroneous belief that I needed Mark's love and affirmation to be whole. I was dependent on Mark emotionally and mentally. So

over time I realized that the bitterness was rooted out of rejection. Mark rejected me and I feared that he no longer needed me. The real fact was I needed him. Although I repeatedly stated I was the one who stuck by him, I was always there for him, and saw the good in him I could not deny self-responsibility. I chose to stay, I chose to love him, I chose to live with the deception, and I chose to live with the disrespect. I made those choices, no one else did. Since I made those choices, to place the blame on Mark would be wrong. The fact is I made some poor choices. The fact is I placed my all, my love, my dreams, my goals, and my destiny into one individual. Essentially, I gave Mark total control over my life. Mark did not ask for it, I gave it to him. I was hurt because I knew I invested time, love, and pain into a relationship. A relationship Mark ended when it no longer suited him. I felt jilted because I lost my investment, not really seeing the bigger picture. Yes, I had invested all those things, by choice. However, who was making an investment in me? I spent so much time trying to please one person, but who was trying to please me, save me, invest in me.

Re-discovery of Self

I believe some experiences in life will always affect us. They will always shape our being, but somewhere along this path we call life our perception changes. Our perception may change because we have new experiences that challenge us and force us to discard old beliefs and behaviors that no longer serve us. Sharing my experience was a very difficult decision for me because as you have gleaned from the narrative I was and still am to some degree concerned with the opinions of others. Concerned that if I opened a wound I have desperately and unsuccessfully sought to keep hidden, the reader would judge me. The fear of your judgment concerns me. However, through this process

with the support of my dissertation committee and friends, I remained focused on the initial purpose of this research. Yes, sharing this experience has identified the cultural influences that shape the self-representation of African American women who have experienced CSA. Moreover, sharing my story exposed the horrible effects of childhood sexual abuse, domestic abuse, and other forms of childhood abuse and neglect. Again, the exploration of this experience has aided me in healing and understanding the individuals who are or were significant characters on this journey.

Yet, I cannot truly articulate the peace and closure I have finally gained. Over the past years I knew this experience affected me, but it was one that I could only address cognitively. I could discuss the details of the experience with little or no emotion. It wasn't until my enrollment in my doctoral program that I began to realize the overwhelming emotion I had internalized. For much of life, I had grown accustomed to feeling for others. I could feel or express deep pain for others, but could not, and was truly unable to express that feeling for myself. My doctoral journey has challenged me, revealed my insecurities, and brought understanding to many unanswered questions. Most importantly, it revealed how removed I was from myself. I was living life, but I was not allowing myself to feel. Since my departure from MTSU, I have had an abundance of love in my life. I have people in my life who truly care about me and love me, yet for so long I've been absent in their lives. I was there physically and there intellectually, but I wasn't there with them emotionally. I was afraid to feel.

I wasn't aware of my fear regarding my emotional tension until I drafted my proposal. Reading the related literature brought back painful memories, and seeing aspects of my experience in the literature was overwhelming. After I proposed my

dissertation topic my committee was concerned about my wellbeing because of the nature of my topic. However, I was confident in my ability to navigate the obstacles. However, the summer of 2011 I was not prepared. I was not prepared to address and feel the emotions I have internalized over the years. There were days during my data collection where I cried. I cried because although I understood certain events mentally, the emotional depth of the pain was being released. Some days when I wrote the narratives I laughed as I reminisced over memories of a truly happy time in life.

I realized that another part of my healing process was grieving the parts of me that died. I was grieving the loss of my childhood innocence, the loss of an ideal love, the loss of my best friend, and the loss of friendships. Most importantly, I was rediscovering the fragments of self I had willingly given away every time I placed someone else's needs and desires before my own. Appreciating the pieces of me that I had discarded because others thought I was too strong or I was too weak. Capturing pieces of my identity that deserved the love that only I could give myself. A love I was seeking from others that was truly hidden inside of me, but was only able to come forth once I was willing to process the loss, guilt, and shame. Releasing feelings that were never mine to carry, and embracing the love that has surrounded me and was always within me.

Re-Discovery for Others

A re-discovery of self has ignited a desire for me to assist others survivors in re-discovering their unique individuality. It is my hope that survivors of childhood sexual abuse, specifically, African American women find this study valuable, since it is one that details the transition from victim to survivor. The journey of healing from childhood sexual abuse is difficult, but once a woman is able to understand the various social

constructs existing in her world she is then in a position to choose how she will define herself (Collins, 2000). My mere presence in a doctoral program placed me in unique position where I am challenged to embark on a journey of self-awareness and move toward self-actualization. However, I think about the numerous African American women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse and were silenced or blamed for their own victimization. I hope they are able to draw strength from my experience, and most importantly learn to forgive themselves.

I hoped women and men of every ethnicity or class found this study helpful as this autoethnography explored my developing, deconstructing, and reconstructing of self through my relationship with others using Relational Cultural Theory. Relational Cultural Theory purports that women are social beings learning from their relationships throughout their life (Miller, 1976) and a woman's self-esteem develops in her relationships with others. The woman's sense of self, emotional health and physical health require connection to other people (Comstock et al., 2008). According to Miller (1976), a woman's sense of self is built around her ability to make and maintain connections. However, when this connection is ruptured there is a loss of relationship, and possibly a loss of total self (Miller, 1976). Exploring my relationships with self and others may provide insight into survivors' hesitancy to disclose sexual abuse and experiences with revictimization in adulthood. Most importantly, this exploration of self and self-in-relation to others will also illustrate the power of relationships in bringing healing to others.

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Appendix A
Personal Memory Data

Autobiographical Timeline

Date	Event	Significance	Discussed in Representation
July 9, 1980	Birth	Day I entered the world	No
1985	Kindergarten	1. Leaving home- no longer with my sister and brother 2. First day of school I returned to the wrong classroom and cried cause I felt alone	No
1986	Kindergarten Graduation	3. Kindergarten Graduation (remember my mom being there)	No
1986	1 st grade	4. Ms. Salt-remember spending every afternoon with her.	Yes
1986	Trip to the store	5. One day after school I went to the store to purchase some cookies. When I returned home my mother was very upset because she was afraid I was hurt.	Yes
1986	Stabbing	6. My classmate Coby's mother was stabbed. She ran down Fourth street crying asking for help. Everyone was kind of paralyzed. Someone called the police but I don't remember anyone (not anyone from my home) trying to help her.	Yes
1986	Fighting	7. Mom & Dad (not sure why but there was fighting).	Yes
1987	2 nd grade	8. Meet Ms. Kabanaw and she tutors me as well. She reminds me of the actresses on television.	Yes
1987	Move	9. My father wants to be closer to home so we move to Tennessee.	Yes
1987	First house	10. Move to TN but we do not have stable housing so we're living with my Aunt until my dad finds a home.	No
1988	3 rd	11. Start 3 rd grade at Bolivar Elementary. Having academic difficulty and falling asleep in class.	No
1987	Highway 64	12. Moved to a home on Highway 64	No
1987	Report Card	13. Receive my first report card and I have F(s)! I thought the F was for fantastic.	No
1987	Christmas	14. Received a Barbie (White) with a long pink dress, although it was my sister who asked for this Barbie. I lied and	No

		said that I wanted the pink Barbie.	
1988	Family Rift	15. My oldest siblings finds out my biological father is not his father. He leaves home and rift develops between my sibling and parent.	No
1989	4 th grade	16. Teacher Ms. Price. Didn't really like her because she was mean, but I was fascinated with curriculum guides/teaching manuals. I would read these materials after I finished my assignments.	No
1989	Trailer	17. Move to a trailer	No
1989	The Boyz	18. Called The Boyz a boy group hotline. The phone bill was \$902.00. For the next two weeks my younger sister and I were whipped on our bottoms for this action.	No
1989	Diary	19. My mom read my diary. Somewhat upset because those were my thoughts.	No
1990	Fire	20. The trailer caught on fire we move in my maternal grandmother	No
1990	5 th grade	21. Ms. Alexander's class	No
1990	Move again	22. Move into a house in Bolivar	No
1990	Sexual Abuse	23. Sexually abused by babysitter	No
1990	Boyfriend	24. Had a boyfriend. He purchased me a necklace and expected to have sex with me because of this. I said no so we broke-up.	No
1991	Bullying	25. Bullied by two girls on the bus. The bullying eventually resulted in a fight.	No
1991	Move	26. Move to Toone TN transition to another school. Didn't like the house we stayed in because it didn't offer any privacy. The bathroom had a curtain as the door.	Yes
1991	Feelings	27. Received funny feelings from older men. As though I knew they were looking at me.	No
1991	6 th grade	28. Toone Tennessee	No
1991	Suicide	29. Sibling attempts suicide	Yes
1992	Graduation	30. My older sister graduates from school and leaves home.	Yes
1992	7 th grade	31. Transition to junior high	No
1992	Move	32. Move to Whiteville TN.	No
1992	Family rift	33. One of my parents attempts suicide	Yes
1992	Body Image	34. Started taking diet pills	Yes
1993	8 th grade	35. Became really active in school. Picked for the cheerleading squad. Loved my teachers Mr. McBroom & Mr.	Yes

		Whitmore	
1993	Sexual Abuse	36. Sexually abused by family member	Yes
1994	Graduation	37. Graduation from Whiteville Elementary as the Salutatorian	Yes
1994	9 th grade	38. Transition to junior high. Joined band and played the flute.	Yes
1995	10 th	39. Marching band attending high school	No
1995	Dress	40. Conversation with father about what women should and should not wear	Yes
1995	Boyfriend	41. Dated guy and we broke up because of his parents.	Yes
1995	Pregnancy	42. Older sister moves back home. Starts bullying me about my weight and nose.	Yes
1996	11 th	43. Received invitation to attend National Conference in D.C.	Yes
1997	12 th	44. Applying for schools	Yes
1997	Move	45. Move into the home my parents built	No
1998	Graduation	46. Graduate from high school and a week later my Aunt Denise dies	Yes
1998	College	47. First semester at MTSU and meet Mark	Yes
1999	Breakup/Makeup	48. Mark and I breakup and get back together	Yes
2000	Fraternity	49. Mark joins fraternity	Yes
2000	RA	50. I become an RA. Mark and I break up again	Yes
2001	AKA	51. I become a member of AKA	Yes
2001	Makeup	52. Mark and I are back together	Yes
2001	MTSU	53. Win homecoming queen/MTSU	Yes
2002	NPHC	54. Very active in NPHC	Yes
2003	NPHC	55. Coordinates NPHC conference	Yes
2003	Separation	56. Rift with sorority sisters	Yes
2003	Graduation	57. Graduate from MTSU	Yes
2003	Higher education	58. Work in Multicultural Affairs and decide to study Higher Education	Yes
2003	Graduate School	59. 1 st semester of Graduate school	Yes
2003	Breakup	60. Mark and I break up for good	Yes
2004	Death	61. Grandmother Corine dies	Yes
2004	Graduation	62. Graduate with Masters	Yes

Appendix A
Personal Memory Data
Inventorying Self

Proverbs

- A close mouth doesn't get fed
 - If you want something it's up to you to advocate for yourself. If you don't advocate for you no one else will.

- Blood is thicker than water
 - Your family takes precedence over anyone and everyone. No matter what your family does that may be detrimental to your well emotional, mental, or physical wellbeing you must forgive them.

- Early bird gets the worm
 - If you want to win you have to be a step ahead of the next person.

- A bad tree does not yield good apples
 - If you come from a bad parent or family you are destined to reap their seeds.

- Knowledge is power
 - When you have an understanding regarding a certain subject you also have power and control.

Appendix A
Personal Memory Data

Rituals and Celebrations

Holidays

- Memorial Day, July 4th, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day is spent with family.

Family Reunion (Paternal family)

- Held Mother's Day weekend.

Funerals

- Great-Grandmother Rosie Blaylock
- Great-Grandfather Stanley Blaylock
- Grandfather George Harris, I
- Aunt Denise
- Uncle Robert

AKA

- Rituals pertaining to the organization

Appendix A
Personal Memory Data

Mentors

- Mr. Lawrence McKinney:
 - Encouraged me to attend college.
- Rita Parram:
 - Church member that encouraged me to attend college, taught me how to behave as a lady, and sincerely interested in my overall self-development.
- Aunt Denise:
 - Encouraged my love for reading and actually listened to me. When I experienced problems I could talk to my Aunt and she would listen.
- Teachers:
 - Throughout my educational journey I have met teachers who have aided in my intellectual development, as well as, self-development.

Appendix B

Personal Values

Personal efficacy:

I believe what I do in life matters, I have control of my destiny, and I must exercise that control to make things happen. I am somewhat impatient with people who have a fatalistic attitude and value people who do everything they can to take control of their lives. To do anything less means to be irresponsible.

Willingness to grow:

I know that almost everything around you will change—even the friends I have throughout my lifetime have changed. I look forward to change and feel that it brings many positives to your life. Change in my culture is a good thing; it means progress. Lack of change leads to stagnation.

Interpersonal Relationships:

Who I am with is more important than what I am doing. Rather than schedule specific activities, I am most likely just to spend time with my friends and family. Being with others is particularly important in my culture. The quality of my interpersonal relations is very important; I try not to allow tasks to get in the way of a relationship.

Appendix C

Artifacts

Item	Data Collection Date	Artifact Type	Time of Collection	Context of production	Access (location & person)	Used in Representation
High school diploma	May 1998	Official document	1994-1998	Signifying the completion of high school and transition to college	Location: Bolivar, TN Person: HS Principal	Yes
Newspaper Announcement	September 1997	Textual artifact	1997	Selected as Most Courteous for my graduating class	Bolivar, TN Reporter: Karissa Steward	No
Newspaper Announcement	October 1997	Textual artifact	1997	Selected as the senior representative for homecoming	Bolivar, TN	No
Airline tickets	August 1996	Textual artifact	1996	Boarding pass for my trip to D.C.	Washington, D.C.	Yes
Nomination to attend National Youth Leadership Forum	June 1996	Official document	1996	Selected to attend conference in D.C.	Washington D.C. NYLF	Yes
Senior Memory Book	May 1998	Textual Artifact	1994-1998	Collection of memories of my high school experiences	Bolivar, TN	Yes
Photo	February 2003	Nontextual artifact	December 2002- February 2003	Given as a gift from the NPHC	Murfreesboro, TN MTSU NPHC	Yes
Grandmother's Obituary	April 17, 2004	Textual artifact	1939-2004	Obituary commemorating my grandmother's life	Bolivar, TN	Yes
Personal text	May 2009	Textual artifact	2004-2008	Text documenting my life since childhood	Murfreesboro, TN	Yes

Appendix D

Data Log

Descriptor	Data collection strategy (Primary labeling)				Data content (Secondary labeling)			
	Date	Collector	Type	Location	Time	People Involved	Source	Place
PMD001	5/2011-8/2011	Harris	Do/Autobiographical timeline	Home	1986-2004	Self/family /	Self	Louisiana Tennessee
PMD002	5/2011-8/2011	Harris	Proverbs	Home	1986-2004	Self/family /others	Self	Louisiana Tennessee
PMD003	5/2011-8/2011	Harris	Rituals/ Celebrations	Home	1986-2004	Self/Family /Friends/ Others	Self	Louisiana Tennessee
PMD004	5/2011-8/2011	Harris	Mentors	Home		Self/Others	Self	Tennessee
SRD001	5/2011-8/2011	Harris	Field Journal	Home/ Library	2011	Self	Self	Tennessee
SRD002	5/2011-8/2011	Harris	Personal Values	Home	2011	Self/others	Self	Louisiana Tennessee
SRD002	5/2011-8/2011	Harris	Culture-gram	Home	2011	Self/others	Self	Tennessee
ED001	8/2011-9/2011	Harris	Official documents	Home	1996-2011	Self/others	Self	Tennessee
ED002	8/2011-9/2011	Harris	Textual Artifacts	Home	1996-2011	Self/others	Self	Tennessee
ED003	8/2011-9/2011	Harris	Nontextual artifacts	Home	1996-2011	Self/others	Self	Tennessee
ED003	8/2011-9/2011	Harris	Nontextual Artifacts-music	Home	1980-2011	Others	Others	Various places